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# THE MINISTRY OF CONVERSION

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BY

ARTHUR JAMES MASON, D.D.

LADY MARGARET'S READER IN DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, AND CANON OF CANTERBURY

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# PREFATORY NOTE

THE following pages were in substance delivered as a course of Lectures at Cambridge in the summer term of the year 1892, by invitation of the Special Board for Divinity.

If they had in the first instance been composed for publication, perhaps they might have been thrown into a more strictly scientific form; but I have felt unwilling, after so long a time, to recast them altogether, fearing that whatever freshness there was in them might be destroyed in the process, without sufficient advantage to compensate for the loss.

CAMBRIDGE, *December* 8, 1901

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VERA NOBIS VITA NON NISI IN CONVERSIONE EST, NEC ALITER AD EAM PATET INGRESSVS, DICENTE DOMINO: NISI CONVERSI FVERITIS ET EFFICIAMINI SICVT PARVVLI, NON INTRABITIS IN REGNVM CAELORVM . . . NEC IMMERITO SANE A FILIIS HOMINVM VIDETVR EXIGENDA CONVERSIO PECCATORIBVS VTIQVE NECESSARIA.

BERNARDVS.

## CHAPTER I

### THE NEED OF THE WORK, AND THE MOTIVES FOR DOING IT

Conversion is, perhaps, not one of those words to which a very precise theological value can be assigned. It is harder to define conversion than it is, for instance, to define repentance, or regeneration, or renewal. The term is comparatively a loose and popular term; and in the course of its history it has gathered to itself associations not always desirable. A man can hardly use the word, so familiar to St. Austin and St. Bernard, without the risk of seeming to identify himself with systems which are not catholic. Even John Wesley speaks of it as a word which he used seldom and with misgivings. The makers of the Revised Version have, if I mistake not, cut it clean out of their New Testament. And yet the word is a good and expressive

word; and the phenomena which are roughly gathered together under it are phenomena which no one can afford to neglect, who is to have the charge of souls. In this, as in all other things, we must learn to "take out the precious from the vile"; and, while avoiding all exaggerations and fanaticisms, not taught by the Spirit of God, it must needs be our wish and endeavour to promote the conversion of souls in that sense in which it is clearly wholesome and scriptural.

It will be our first duty to gather together the chief passages in the New Testament in which the term is used, or would be used if a pedantic consistency of translation had been the rule of King James' translators. In one famous passage, the word "convert" represents the simple verb *στρέφειν*, "to turn": "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted," or turned, "and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." In the rest, it represents the compound *ἐπιστρέφειν*, "to turn to." Thus Paul and Barnabas declared "the conversion (*ἐπιστροφήν*) of the Gentiles"—the only instance of the sub-

stantive. The verb, as is natural with verbs of motion, is used in more than one way. Sometimes it is directly transitive in its use, whether in the active or in the passive: "Many of the children of Israel shall he convert to the Lord their God;" "to convert them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;" "if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save his soul from death." And so in the passive: "Ye were as sheep going astray, but have now been converted to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." But more commonly the word is used in the intransitive sense, by which the act of conversion is regarded not immediately as the work of God's grace or of the evangelist whom that grace employs, but as the voluntary act of the convert himself. Thus three times over the words of Isaiah, which St. John quotes in the passive form, are quoted by other writers intransitively: "Lest they should understand with their heart, and convert, and I should heal

them." Other examples are our Lord's words to St. Peter: "And thou, when thou hast converted, strengthen thy brethren;" and St. Peter's to the Jews: "Repent therefore and convert, that your sins may be blotted out." Thus conversion is sometimes spoken of as a gracious effect produced upon a man by some agency outside him, and sometimes as a movement of the man himself. Both accounts of the matter are true. He "is converted," and he "converts." This is the very cry of Ephraim in the prophet—a cry which we make our own in the Commination Service —ἐπίστρεψόν με καὶ ἐπιστρέψω, "Convert me, and I shall convert, for Thou art the Lord my God" (Jer. xxxi. 18).

The word denotes a change of attitude or direction. Whereas the man was before facing one way, he now faces another way. In the simple, uncompounded verb (στρέφειν), attention is drawn particularly to the movement or change itself, rather than to the direction adopted by means of it. When our Lord says to the disciples, "Except ye be turned (ἐὰν μὴ στραφῆτε),

ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," He is condemning the attitude or direction which they had for the time assumed, not specifying that which He would have them substitute for it. He specifies the right attitude in the words which follow, "and become as little children" —a most important clause, which is very frequently omitted by those who quote the rest of the saying; but it is not specified in the actual phrase "Except ye be turned." He tells these men, who are wrangling for the highest position in the kingdom of heaven, that they are taking a wrong line, and that unless they cease to pursue it, there will be for them no question of higher or lower in the kingdom, but a certainty of exclusion altogether. Something must come and change the bent of their lives —that is the force of the passive—because at present it is wrong and fatal. Pride, ambition, envy, self-seeking, even under the most specious pretext, can only be the ruin of the soul; and therefore the first thing is to be made to "face about," if I may say so, and turned in

a different direction. Our Lord is not, therefore, using the word in the full sense which is commonly attached to the word "conversion," but in the more limited and negative sense which implies an alteration, but does not define what the alteration is to be,—which says, "You are going the wrong way," but leaves it to be inferred what is the right way.

In the compound verb, which is far commoner, attention is called not only to the change of attitude, but also to the new attitude to be assumed. It would be too much to say that ἐπιστρέφειν always means to "turn *back*," to "revert," though it often distinctly means that, and perhaps usually carries that shade of meaning; but at least it means to "turn *to*," the opposite of "turning away." Sometimes, indeed, the conversion may be in the *wrong* direction, as: "Then will they turn to," or convert, "unto other gods," in Deuteronomy; or, "How turn ye to," or return, or convert ye, "unto the weak and beggarly elements," in Galatians; or in St. Peter, "The dog turning to," or returning, "to

his own vomit." In these cases — perhaps even in the first—there seems to be something of the thought of coming back to a normal attitude, which has been abandoned for a time. And this would seem to be the instinctive thought which lies beneath the choice of this compound verb in those many instances in which it is used for a conversion of the right sort.

Frequently the object to which the convert turns is expressly named. "All the inhabitants of Lydda saw him, and they turned to," or converted, "to the Lord." "We preach you a gospel, that ye turn to," or convert, "from these vain things unto a living God." "Whensoever Israel shall turn to," or convert, "unto the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." "How ye turned to," or converted, "unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God." All these are cases where the change is a change from one religious system to another, from Paganism or Judaism to Christianity; but the change is not spoken of in its external aspect, but in its internal aspect, affecting personal relations.

Many instances might be brought out of the Greek Old Testament where the conversion apparently involves no transference from system to system, and in which the words "to the Lord" or "to God" are not expressly added, but where it is at once felt that they are implied, the outward adherent of a true religion being brought inwardly into the power of it. "The law of the Lord is an undefiled law, converting," turning to, "the soul." "He shall convert my soul," or turn it to. "Turn us to," convert us, "O Lord God of Hosts; shew the light of Thy countenance, and we shall be whole." In all these passages, it is felt that the conversion is a true reversion, a turning back to the proper and natural attitude—the natural attitude towards God Himself in the first instance, and therefore towards all other things. Conversion, in whatever manner it takes place, is the bringing of the soul home to a right relation with God.

If this be so, we must ask next who they are that stand in need of such a conversion. The

answer is plain. All men at some time need to be converted. Unless the Church is in error about the doctrine of original sin, there is not one of us who is born with a soul already right towards God. By nature, if the present unnatural state of things can be called nature, we are averse from God. The soul's first movements have in them something of rebellion and self-will. If we are left alone, the evil elements in us develop more rapidly and successfully than the good. Inherited corruption is not the same in all men, either in kind or in degree; but in all men there is inherited corruption, and, as St. Paul teaches us, the necessary result of it, when unchecked, is "enmity with God." If, therefore, the soul which comes into existence in such conditions is to be restored to its true and rightful relation with God, it must needs undergo a "conversion." Whether we like that word or not, every human being since the Fall, save One, has something to turn from, to which it is naturally prone, and something to turn to, for which it has not, in the first instance, an inclination.

But perhaps it will be thought that, in saying this, I am detracting from the value of that holy sacrament which most of us now receive in infancy. Can we reconcile the doctrine of the new birth in baptism with the statement that all men need conversion? Yes; there is no conflict between the two things, unless conversion is interpreted after a special and restricted and arbitrary manner. Taken in its broadest sense, as the bringing of the soul into a right relation with God, conversion is necessary if baptism is not to have been received in vain. Baptism is no substitute for conversion. Baptism is a matter of spiritual endowment; conversion is a matter of the will. It does not avail the soul to have received the most rich and priceless of privileges, if the will prefers to remain in estrangement from God. What is this but to say, with Hooker, and with all right reason, that sacraments are "moral means" by which God acts upon us, and not *non*-moral means, which in this instance would really be *im*moral means, bestowing salvation irrespective of character?

Of course, in the case of persons grown up without baptism, conversion, reasonably complete, must be required before they are baptized. We cannot demand the same of infants, because, although it is quite possible that true conversion may take place in infancy, we have no means of testing it. Doubtless in many instances the grace which regenerates the infant soul in baptism succeeds in converting it at the same time, and in such ways as are possible for infancy, the little child of God begins at once to correspond to the privilege bestowed upon it, and freely turns from what is wrong to what is right, as a flower-bud turns from the shade towards the sun. I do not believe that there is a day in the life of a human being, not even the first day, when it is not a moral subject. All careful observers of little children can see that they evince the workings of conscience long before they know the meaning of words. I do not doubt, therefore, that in numberless instances that change of moral direction and attitude, of which I am speaking, takes place along with the

infant's baptism, if not before. In dealing with little Christian children, I should always assume that this is the case, and seek to educate and develop and edify what they are, rather than to produce a change in them other than the change of progress.

But the fact remains that some, both in infancy and in riper years, are baptized, and confirmed too, and receive the Holy Communion, without their spiritual and moral attitude being thereby changed. Their status is necessarily changed, but not necessarily their aim and tendency. God's grace has been truly given to them. They are responsible for it. They are not in the position of heathens, though they may think it, and wish it. "This shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen that are round about us." They are sons of God. The kingdom of heaven is their birthright. It is already in their power to rise to heights of holiness and of glory by that habitual grace which they possess. But as sacraments are no substitute for conversion, so neither do

they in every case produce it. Men may remain unaffected, or but little affected, by what they have received. For all purposes of salvation it might have been as well with them, or better, if they had not received it. The fact, therefore, that we have to deal with masses of baptized people must not make us think that we have no need to work for conversions, although it will profoundly modify our way of going to work.

There are many classes of grown persons, baptized or not, who stand in need of a ministry of conversion. I speak advisedly of classes, not of individuals, because it is often impossible to judge of individual cases, and most unwise to attempt it. Obviously, large classes of men and women need conversion, because they are openly living in sin, and every well-worked parish of any size has its agencies for attempting to effect this. No one doubts that drunkards, and harlots, and those who associate with them—thieves, gamblers, and coarse scoffing unbelievers—must be brought round if they are to be saved, though it is to be feared that some are content

with endeavouring to produce in them a reformation of manners without producing a change of heart.

But besides these, there are many others who, though not positively committed to the wrong way, are not positively committed to the right. They sin in moderation, but the main inward drift of their minds is towards sin. They take things easily. They have not renounced their duty to God, and they make the usual external acknowledgments of it. But the world and the flesh have too many attractions for them, and they are not yet prepared to break with them. In comparison with the claims of earthly enjoyment higher calls seem shadowy and distant. Esau knows by positive experience that the red pottage satisfies an imperious want; he has no such certainty about spiritual blessings: "What good," he asks, "shall this birthright do me?" Perhaps he even calculates that he can recover the birthright afterwards, though for the moment he may despise it. A thousand speculative doubts, as in the case of St. Austin, very probably

come in to reinforce the claims of the immediate and the tangible, by weakening those of the spiritual and eternal.

Many a man, many a young man—baptized and confirmed, alas!—is in that most tragical position which St. Austin describes, when, speaking of himself in his unbaptized youth, he says that he used to pray, out of the midst of his boyish sensuality, *Da mihi castitatem*, yet added, *sed noli modo*. Such prayers may be prayed with tears and groans, and yet the heart be unconverted. Much self-reproach, self-contempt, self-loathing, much self-pity for having been entangled in the misfortune of sin, is compatible with remaining in the sin. The man is exceedingly sorry that he ever knew what sin was, and wishes, sometimes with ardour, that he were well out of it, but he does not break away from it. I have seen a young man "weeping like rain," as they say in Cornwall, at the thought of God's love and of his own sin, and yet unwilling to take obvious steps to undo the wrong he has done.

The man has very likely had experience of

visitations of the Spirit of God, which have touched him, unsought, with joyful and even with intoxicating emotions; yet he does not really lay hold upon the Redeemer with a living and lasting faith. Perhaps he may even be attempting to do a little to help other people, and give them good advice, and yet he lives for the time being a life such, that if it were suddenly to cease without time to alter, none but the infallible Judge could tell which way the soul must go. And persons in such a condition as this need to be brought to a crisis. It is not enough for such souls to be fed with the ordinary daily portion, as if all were well with them. Very likely it may not be possible even for a watchful pastor to know which of his young people is in such a state; but it will do no harm for him every now and then to assume that *some* are in such a state, and, in public at least, to speak accordingly. They must be helped to put an end to the halting between two opinions, and to make once and for all a firm decision.

There is another class of persons very different

from these, and much harder to reach, who equally stand in need of conversion. They are the self-satisfied people, of different sorts. Some are self-satisfied on the score of well-conducted lives, and of many moral virtues which they often really possess. Others, perhaps a growing class in the present day, are self-satisfied on the score of religious observances. Their orthodoxy is unimpeachable. Ritual and ecclesiastical rules are familiar ground to them. Perhaps they go frequently to confession, and to a rigorous confessor. What is truly valuable in these persons and their practices is not at all to be undervalued. To be morally virtuous, intellectually well-informed, willing to be subjected to good rules—these are things of which God forbid that we should speak with any touch of scorn. Yet they are all possible for a heart which is not in a right relation to God. Good so far as they go, they can become even a greater hindrance to true conversion than profligacy and ignorance. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus ranks higher among the triumphs of the Gospel than the con-

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version of Zacchaeus or Mary Magdalene. When the change that must take place wears a distinct outward form, when the direction from which the man must turn is plain and obvious, it is a much easier business than where the man has perhaps to go on doing very much the same things as before, only with a different temper and feeling. The stormy woes and denunciations of our Lord scarcely availed to awake the Pharisees to the facts of life, when "Go in peace and sin no more" was enough for the detected adulteress. We have indeed a hard task before us when we are called to strive for the conversion of those who are correctly formal.

And here may come in a word upon that which cannot truly be called conversion, although it is frequently so called, and perhaps often appears to be so to the subjects of it themselves. Take the case of lives which have never consciously been turned away from God, but have been directed humbly and faithfully to the doing of His will ever since He laid hold upon their infancy. The Christian life ought normally to

advance in this quiet manner, exchanging grace for grace, going from strength to strength, receiving revelations from faith to faith, transformed into the same image from glory to glory, without stop or stay, from the beginning to the end. "The path of the just" should be "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." "The kingdom of God" within should "come without observation." Yet even those lives which have least to turn from, those lives which most nearly answer to this calm and beautiful ideal, have their moments, their great occasions, their outbursts and inbursts, leaps and flashes, accesses of light and understanding. It was surely so even in that one pattern Life which needed no conversion. We seem intended to suppose that such an epoch of new insight came to His human soul when He was left alone for the three days in the Temple, and spoke in His first recorded words about His relationship to His Father. We can have no doubt of it in connection with His baptism, and the opened heaven which then He saw. In another direc-

tion we are plainly told of it when hell rather than heaven was disclosed to Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, and Jesus was "sore amazed" at the disclosure. If this be so with the life of Christ, then we may expect it to be so with the lives of most Christians, and may well strive that events like Confirmation, or other occasions which the Divine Providence sends, may prove to the souls which we tend epochs of new, even sudden, realisation of the meaning of great truths. Even where we believe that there is no need of a conversion, there may be room for awakening. Persons of whose salvation there can be no real question—humble-minded as well as dutiful—often lack the force and the glow which they would have if only their eyes were more fully opened; and the work of an evangelist will include the attempt thus to awaken well-disposed souls to fresh perception, both of the goodness of God and of the sinfulness of sin.

I do not consider the ministry of conversion, or of awakening either, to be the main part of the duties of an ordinary parish priest. He

must of necessity be occupied for the most part of his time with the needs of souls already awakened and converted. Nor do I think that all are equally endowed for this special work. Christ still gives "some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." I should be very sorry to maintain that the function of the pastor is less exalted, because it is less showy, than the function of the evangelist. But the pastor must not, at any rate, forget those unsatisfactory and unsatisfied ones who, at any given moment, are probably the majority of his parishioners. The parish priest is always tempted to forget them, especially in great town parishes, where he has extensive organisations to manage, and things move prosperously along, and the numbers of communicants are so large as to weaken the sense of their being small in proportion to what they should be. We need an increasing number of ministers who keep steadily before them the duty that they owe to the less promising portions of their flock.

How seriously the Ordinal insists upon this

part of our duty, "to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for His children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever;" "never cease your labour, your care and diligence, till you have done all that lieth in you, to bring all that are committed to your charge unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, that there be no place left among you either for error in religion or for viciousness in life!" This is not the language of men who contemplate a pastor sitting comfortably among the ninety and nine sheep which are content with the fold, and solacing himself in their devotion for the straying of the hundredth. "In our own age and nation," says a well-known book, "the particular form of spiritual power for which we have most crying need, is that whereby men who know the truth are brought to the point of deciding for God, and setting out in earnest on the way to heaven. We are in danger of labouring as if the ground still needed to be sown, while the fields are white unto the harvest,

and need but a reaper. We are in danger of preaching as if the people were either all serving God, or were all so far away from the possibility of being converted soon, that they must be approached as from a distance, and principles laid down and left to work, which may bring forth fruit after some long time, whereas the fact is that everywhere the ground is sown. We meet with comparatively few men in whose minds there is not enough of truth to awaken their conscience and point them towards the Cross, were that truth only brought home to their hearts with power. Men fitted as instruments to use what the people believe and know, in order to bring them to a decision for God, are those whom the interests of our generation most loudly call for."[1] I do not maintain that this superlative is exactly correct, but at any rate there are few things more loudly called for than the converting power of which Mr. Arthur here speaks.

What, then, are some of the chief motives

[1] Arthur, "Tongue of Fire," p. 254.

which may impel us to seek from God a greater supply of the Spirit's power for the ministry of conversion?

First, naturally, a love of souls. This is not the commonest of gifts. There are reasons for fearing lest it is becoming less common than it was. Possibly our widening views about mankind as a whole, about social problems at large, about the Church as a Church, somewhat take off—though they ought not—our attention from the individual unit; while, on the other hand, our unbounded development of personal liberty makes it more plausible to say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" as meaning not merely, "Why should I be troubled with my brother's affairs?" but also, "What business have I to meddle with them?"

And perhaps we are less moved than our grandfathers were by the thought of the risk which unconverted men are running. We are half ashamed or half afraid to dwell upon the terrors of the loss of the soul. I am not altogether sorry for it, so far as open speech is

concerned. I do not wish to bring back coarse, material, indiscriminate language about hell-fire. But even if we say little on the subject, it ought not to hold a little place in our thoughts. If it is holy awe, and not unbelief, which checks our tongues, it ought all the more to stimulate our hearts, and drive us solemnly and persistently to the rescue of the perishing. It is well to read every now and then such a book as Pusey's "Addresses during a Retreat of the Companions of the Love of Jesus, engaged in Perpetual Intercession for the Conversion of Sinners"; and then to think of the words in the Ordinal, "If it shall happen the Church, or any member thereof, to take any hurt or hindrance by reason of your negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault and also the horrible punishment that will ensue." It is a fearful thing to be guilty of the blood of souls, but it is a guilt easy to contract. "Negligence" is all that is needed. Those who cannot greatly dread hell on behalf of others may well dread it for themselves, when they remember what is

said about the watchman who fails to warn the wicked from his way.

But even if the sense of the positive danger of the sinner is a motive which does not act much upon us, we ought, if we love souls, to be moved by thinking of what the sinner is losing in this life as well as in the next. Whether he be formalist, or miser, or drunkard, or mere weakling, or whatever he may be, if we have had any experience ourselves of the peace, the joy, the strength, the victory, the utility of true religion, it cannot but go to our hearts to see men spending their money upon that which is not bread, and their labour on that which satisfieth not. What might not those poor deluded ones enjoy in the knowledge and love of Christ, who are now daily making themselves more incapable of enjoying anything save that which perishes in the using! and what might not be made of those powers which are now so wasted and abused! The pity of it all! If it is nothing to us what such men are doing with their lives, we have great need

to pray that the Spirit of God may give us more love of souls. Love is His gift, both towards God and towards men. As He takes of that which is Christ's and shews it to us, until our hearts are moved at the sight of it, so also, if we will, He shews us also the things of our fellow-men in such a way that even the dullest, most unattractive, stubborn, impenetrable lives offer points upon which Christian love can seize. Any one can love those who are naturally engaging, but our Lord expects of us to "do more than others," and to love, as the Father loves, even the unthankful and the evil, with a love which refuses to be baulked.

Another motive to impel us to the work of conversion is the motive which springs from the desire for the advancement of the kingdom of God, and of that sacred cause in which we are enlisted. Every true convert made is not only a gain in himself, but becomes an instrument for fresh work on beyond. This is St. Paul's motive for not merely abstaining from fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but

for reproving them—the way in which every successful aggression upon the realm of darkness becomes the means of fresh aggressions beyond. "All things," he says, "when thus reproved are made manifest by the light; for every successive thing that is made manifest (whatever its character may have been before) is itself light; wherefore He saith, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall irradiate thee.'" So the true light spreads and spreads, reflecting itself from every newly illuminated point into some dark spot beyond. "I think, sir," said an ignorant but true-hearted man, a year or so after the light had reached him, "that every one of us can bring one other;" and he said what he had proved to be true.

Such a motive ought especially to weigh with any of us who have reason to fear that sins or negligences of our own have before now retarded the kingdom of God, and done injury to souls. It ought to brace us for reparation and revenge, so far as this may be possible. Those who suffered directly and in the first instance at

our hands may, by sad mishap, be beyond reach of our attempts at redress. They may even be past praying for. "There is sin unto death; not concerning it do I say that he should pray." But even so we may take a kind of revenge by bringing others captive to Christ in their stead. The famous incident in the life of St. Columba is full of everlasting encouragement—how, after the quarrel which he had stirred had issued in the death of many men, he was sent away to bring at least one heathen sinner to repentance and faith for every life which he had been the means of cutting off; and Iona, and all that has streamed to the Church from Iona, was the result. And when we have taken revenge for our own sins by the conversion of sinners, we may go on to take revenge for the sins and negligences of those with whom we are bound up, for those "offences of our forefathers" which we pray may not be remembered, and for those of all our brethren. We cannot atone, in the sense of merit, for the least of all of them; but we can thus practically shew the depth and earnestness of our penitence.

And last I will mention, as underlying all other motives to impel us in the cause of evangelisation, the desire for the honour and glory of our Saviour and our Lord. If we have in any measure realised what we ourselves owe to Him, we shall long inexpressibly to spread the knowledge of His goodness and His beauty, and to kindle in the hearts of others—not for their good alone, but for His praise—the same fire which burns—only how feebly it burns—in ours. I remember somewhere, I cannot remember where, seeing those words of the old Latin drinking song boldly applied to the love of our Lord Jesus Christ:—

> "Cras amet qui numquam amauit, quique amauit cras amet."

He has permitted us to experience something, however little, of the blessedness of loving Him, and we cannot but desire that that love of His may attain the universal sway which is due to it, and that those who have never loved Him may learn to love Him by to-morrow, and that those who love Him already may to-morrow love Him

better. And in this, His mind is with ours. We are not presenting to Him strangers for whom as yet He has not cared. For each of them He has the same intense and sublime love that He has shewn for ourselves. It is only His love for them which makes it possible for the Christian's efforts to reach them; and the human agent only "converts" them, brings them home, to a Shepherd and Bishop of their souls who has already laid down His very life for them.

## CHAPTER II

### THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE WORK

Opportunities for performing the ministry of conversion present themselves in a variety of forms, both public and private. The Gospel can be preached both to crowds of persons assembled together, or to individuals in solitude. I will speak first of private opportunities.

No object in life lends itself more easily to satire and dislike than the man who thrusts a tract or a leaflet upon every one he meets in the omnibus or the train, and makes himself the bore and plague of the hotel by asking each new-comer if he is converted. Perhaps few people do more harm to the cause of religion.

And yet this man is but the caricature of what a true evangelist should be. One who is full of the Spirit of Christ cannot be indifferent to even the casual stranger. He loves every one whom

he sees for Christ's sake; and love desires the highest good of its object. At any cost to itself it seeks to confer that good. It feels that to abstain, out of cowardice, or slothfulness, or any unworthy cause, from doing another a kind turn, is only less bad than to do him an unkind one. "Withhold not good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it." There are none to whom good is not due; and who can tell how long it may be in the power of your hand to do it? To-day you are thrown with a man; and he is gone to-morrow, and you meet him no more until you meet before the Judge and the Master. You sit, it may be, in the railway train for a few hours conversing with a man, or he drives you in a trap through country lanes. May it not be that the Spirit of the Lord has caught you up, in order that, as Philip was bidden to "join himself to" the passing "chariot," so you may "join yourself" to this one traveller, and make him understand what he reads about the Lamb and the baptismal water? "Sir," said the driver

of a Cornish omnibus, "you'm a minister of religion, I suppose, by the dress of you; but we've been talking these two hours, and you've said nothing to me about my soul." In the particular case, the minister's silence may have been right, and the driver's rebuke a bit of canting impertinence, for all I know; but the incident was suggestive.

Certainly we are not to keep our Gospel to ourselves and only produce it on those stated occasions when necessity is laid upon us and we have to preach it whether we will or not. Sermons can be effectively delivered without a pulpit. The inhabitants of our own parishes have the first claim upon us, but they are not the only ones who have a claim. Hard as it may sound to say so, the minister who has been "put in trust with the Gospel" is never completely off duty—not even on a holiday—nor does he wish to be so. Like the blessed Lord and His Apostles, he may—nay, he ought when he can—go apart for refreshment and relief for body and mind at proper intervals, and not go on

without interruption in the rush of work with "many coming and going," and "no leisure so much as to eat"; but when our Lord's brief holiday was broken in upon by those in need, He set to work, and His disciples likewise, and did not dismiss them till they were satisfied.

I am not advocating, after all, a promiscuous attempt to force religious conversation upon all whom we meet, or saying that a duty has been left undone if we have been in a man's company for half-an-hour without examining whether he is converted or not. I should stand greatly self-condemned if I said so, for I do not even propose to make it my own invariable practice. There are many occasions when it is best not to attempt it.

We all know what use is made of St. Paul's exhortation to Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season." It means, some would tell us, that in all circumstances and in all companies, without any exception, even when it will appear most incongruous and out of place, Timothy is to preach. The interpretation at first seems to be supported by the great authority

of St. Austin. *Opportune utique uolentibus*, he says, *importune nolentibus*. Preach to those who like it, and preach to those who do not. Even this, however, is very different from the common interpretation. Frequently enough we are bound to preach the word to those who do not like it, and yet it is quite "in season" to do so. But in the first place St. Paul does not say, "Preach the word in season and out of season," but, "Be instant in season, out of season." There may often be reserve and reticence on the part of Timothy, but never a flagging of his insistent purpose. It may often be the truest mode of prosecuting the work, to say nothing about it. We do not obey St. Paul's injunction, nor St. Austin's either, by dragging our Gospel in without regard to the feelings of those whom we address. When we visit parishioners, and find them evidently very busy; or accost a stranger in the presence and hearing of other strangers (unless it be to reprove a sin committed in their presence); or feel that we are really taking an unfair advantage of a man; or have good reason

to think that for any cause remarks on religious subjects would do more harm than good—then for God's sake we must hold our tongues. The object of speaking is to help the other's soul; if speaking will manifestly have the opposite result, St. Paul would certainly never bid us speak.

No; let us never preach "out of season," in the sense of preaching on occasions really unsuitable for those whom we address. St. Chrysostom's comment on the words is much nearer to the mark. "Do not keep," he says, "to some fixed season of your own; but let it be always the season to you." The safe rule is to be always *ready* to speak. We must see that it is not *our* fault, if souls which might have profited by what we could tell them leave us unprofited. As Archbishop Leighton says on St. Peter's injunction to be ready to give an answer to any challenge, "It was not always to be *done* to every one, but we, being *ready* to do, are to consider when, and to whom, and how far." This can only be a matter of the Spirit's guid-

ance, acting through human sympathy. "The best way to know when to rebuke," says Henry Martyn, "is to love"; and the same may be said of all informal preachings. Act in the spirit of Him who said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Love the man too well to injure him with well-meant words about his soul; and yet love the man so well as to take joyfully whatever opening the Spirit of God may give you with him.

What I have now said with regard to opportunities offered by casual meetings and passing acquaintances, holds good, of course, with regard to more settled friendships. It is hardly possible to be too shy of anything like pretentiousness; but how many openings present themselves for words that go below the conventional irony of our ordinary life. How many a man owes his first serious concern about his soul to a conversation with a friend on a country walk or in the quiet of a private room! The parish priest in his own parish has numberless opportunities of preaching the Gospel to his people in private,

and even to those who do not come to hear him preach it in public.

Of all such opportunities, none, of course, are so useful as a serious sickness or accident. Then is the time for fervent intercessions, that hearts hitherto closed may be opened by the converting grace of God, and for those untiring but not oppressively long or frequent visits which are often to men a wholly new revelation of the pastor's love. How often we find such an experience as this, which came under my eyes in a country village not long ago. A railway crossing-keeper had been the bitterest enemy of the Church, openly and violently speaking evil of the blameless parson of the parish, and being in other ways no better than he should be. He met with an accident, and lay dying of it for several months. The parson, who had never, of course, taken any notice of his insults, began to visit him regularly, bringing to bear upon him, as was natural, all

> "Those little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love,"

of which Wordsworth speaks, until the man was ready to take in what he had to teach him. Then point came after point, until all the main elements of the Gospel stood out clear to his surprised soul. A few days before he died, he said to the stationmaster, from whom I learned the story, "I wish I had a year to live; I would set an example." The pious stationmaster observed that many people say the same, but fail when the test is applied. "Nay, but I should," he replied, "under Mr. X.'s tuition I should make a pattern man."

The visitation of the sick, like that of those in health, taken as a whole, is a subject beyond the purpose of these chapters; and I will only say of it that experience seems to shew more and more convincingly every year that it is the most important of all parochial works, not excepting the teaching in the schools, nor the preaching in the church, and that the decay of steady visiting by the clergy would mean the decay of Christianity in England.

My only concern now with the visitation of the

sick is in those cases where there is reason to fear that the sick person has not been living in that right relation to God of which I spoke in my last chapter. It becomes the duty of the priest to bring him to it, to convert him, by the aid of Divine grace. And this is very hard, especially in cases of great pain and weakness, where it is impossible to say much at one visit. The temptation at such times to a sympathetic heart is to offer only what people call the consolations of religion, to soothe and quiet, and to speak only of the mercies of God; and certainly if we have time to speak of nothing else, it is best to speak of these only. But if there is opportunity for more, we ought not to be content with consolations. There is stern work to be done, though with the most merciful spirit and the tenderest touch. We are not encouraged in the Bible to heal the wounds of the soul "slightly"; to say, "Peace, peace," when the conditions of peace are absent; to "prophesy smooth things"; to say to the impenitent, "Thou shalt surely live." What the poor people call a "beautiful end" is easily

brought about by lulling conscience and hushing up a godless past; but it can be too dearly purchased. The Prayer-book, after reminding the sick man most touchingly of the fatherly kindness of God, and of Christ's sufferings, and of the supports of faith, breaks off its prescribed exhortation and lays the rest upon the minister. "Then shall the minister examine whether he repent him truly of his sins, and be in charity with all the world." This is a process which sometimes breaks up "beautiful ends." A priest of great experience told me that he had to visit a woman near her end whom the Wesleyans had left radiant and triumphant. He asked her about a sister of hers with whom she had long been at open enmity, and the poor creature raised herself up in her bed with a face full of hatred and said, "Never mention that woman to me again." We must endeavour, when duty demands it, to shatter self-complacency where it seems to exist, in the sick as well as in the whole, in order to lead people to a better confidence.

Naturally, however, the chief opportunities of

the minister of conversion are those connected with public duties—with preaching. And how shall so wide a subject be touched upon?

It must be remembered that I am speaking exclusively of preaching which has for its object the conversion of the unconverted. Not that there is any positive difference to be traced between the preaching which converts and other preaching, as if the two things were impossible to unite. On the one hand the sermons which are most potent in converting souls are generally very useful to advanced Christians also; and on the other hand, an unconverted man is often brought to see things in a new light by hearing what probably no preacher would specially have addressed to him. Yet speaking roughly, it is a true distinction which Bishop Dupanloup draws between the ordinary parochial preaching and the *prédication de conquête;* and it is practically useful to remember the distinction. Many of our sermons fail of effect because we do not ourselves know what we wish them to effect, or to what part of our audience we wish the different portions

of the sermon to apply. Even if we do not use the language, we need in preaching a good deal of George Herbert's "This is for you, and this is for you." A famous anecdote cautions us against saying, "I now proceed to divide my hearers into two classes, the converted and the unconverted," but it is well to recognise that both classes may be represented in the congregation, and not always to take it for granted that they need nothing more than an interesting instruction or a quiet meditation.

No hard and fast rule can be laid down upon these matters, and every parish priest who knows what people are likely to attend which services, will arrange his discourses to suit them. But it seems natural (in ordinary places) to look upon a Sunday morning sermon as a suitable occasion for instructing people, or a sermon to the little regular congregation which gathers on a week-day as properly devoted to meditative and consolatory purposes, while a Sunday evening sermon may well be in time a little longer, and in substance more free and more distinctly intended to

awaken. Special seasons, of course, like Lent and Advent, offer natural opportunities for evangelistic preaching on Sunday evenings,—with extempore prayers, perhaps, in an after meeting. Nothing is productive of more or of better conversions than the exercises of Holy Week, when the narrative of the Passion is set forth with simplicity and feeling. Not only do all the faithful profit deeply by them, but careless people and even—I speak from knowledge — professed unbelievers, sometimes, whom curiosity, or some social reason, has attracted to the Three Hours, come away believing, humbled, and resolved.

It is very advisable, in many places, at not too frequent intervals, to gather the men together for addresses to themselves by themselves, when the incumbent or others may speak to them freely. Perhaps, however, I ought to say by way of caution, that it is a fatal mistake to assume at such gatherings that all the men are sceptics, or profligate, or secretly vicious. It is no more true than that a gathering of women necessarily consists of finished saints; and the

men will soon cease to attend the gatherings if they find that the topic is invariably a denunciation of impurity or of atheism.

The bulk of the sermons in a parish church must necessarily be of the nature of instruction and exposition: people get sick of exhortations and appeals, and long for facts. The Archbishop of Canterbury was saying the other day that a working man with whom he had lately travelled said it did him no good to go to church; "The parsons always sing the same song," he said; "If you want to be happy, be good, be good; if you want to be happy, be good." This, however, I feel sure of, that if congregations are to be kept up, and kept alive also, there must be throughout the year a strong infusion in the sermons of those elements of the Gospel which make it so peculiarly a Gospel. There are, indeed, churches where large and admiring congregations are kept together by other means—by showy music and the like; but it is not a sight to gladden the heart. This is not Christianity.

There is one form of evangelistic preaching about which I feel especially compelled to speak. It is that which we know by the name of a Mission. Missions have become so common of late years, that probably there are few readers of these pages who have not at some time or another taken part in them, or been at least present at them. They have become an accepted branch of the work of the Church. Since the late Archbishop of Canterbury set the example in 1877 by appointing a diocesan missioner in Cornwall many dioceses in England have made the like appointments. A few persons will still be found to express their dislike and distrust of missions; but they will generally, I think—where the motive is not simple sloth or indifference—appear to be persons who do not know what a mission is, or who have had experience of one that has been unwisely conducted.

The all but universal testimony of earnest men is in favour of these special efforts. It is not English Churchmen only who think well of them. In imitation of them the Methodists in

many places are dropping their earlier "revivals," and adopting our nomenclature, and to a certain extent our methods. In the Roman Catholic churches of the Continent the practice has for two centuries been reduced to a regular art, with rival schools of professors. The Jesuit, Adrien Nampon, whose book is the recognised manual on the subject among French Roman Catholics, quotes some score of resolutions of Provincial Councils and Diocesan Synods passed within a few years of each other in the nineteenth century, urging the holding of missions in every parish once in every five or six years, which he prefaces with a brief to the same effect from Pius IX. to the episcopate of Austria. Almost every town in England of any size has now had experience of one or more general missions; and I am thankful to think that they are being held with increasing frequency and utility in country villages also.

It is, of course, important in the extreme that missions should only be undertaken with great caution, and with true solemnity. Few mistakes could be more mischievous than to set on foot a

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mission rashly, where either the place was unprepared, or where the missioner was unsuited to it. A bishop, or a diocesan missioner, now finds it to be a serious part of his business to check the holding of missions in such unsuitable places. An unsuitable place is one where the clergyman is quite new, unless he acts as missioner himself. Missions are generally the most effective in the parishes already best worked, and where the church is flourishing. Circumstances may indeed make it right to hold them in places of the opposite sort; I remember once taking a mission of five weeks in a parish where I was called in to stay the last communicant of the parish from going over to dissent. But cases where such a course would be wise must be very exceptional. An eminently unsuitable place for a mission is a parish where the clergyman is not respected, or has alienated by fault of his own a large part of the parish from himself and from the church. There, if a mission lays hold upon the people at all, it will be almost impossible after it is over to satisfy their newly awakened

cravings. They will either relapse into indifference, or will feel constrained to seek spiritual sympathy and help among dissenters. It is a piteous thing to see those whom a mission has raised into a longing after higher life and full instruction, starved by the refusal of their pastors to give them afterwards what perhaps they had not cared to have before. A mission almost inevitably, unless it is a failure, involves increased demands upon the pastor's time and care, and where he is not prepared to give it, it would be better to defer the effort until some Divine Providence may remove or change him.

But on the other hand, there are many instances where a parish priest has not been appreciated by his people, and yet respected,—where he has done his duty as well as he knew how, and is prepared to do it better if he can be shewn the way to improve,—in which a well-managed mission has had a blessed effect in drawing pastor and people together. Indeed this is one of the commonest advantages of a good mission. Priests unacquainted with them sometimes raise against

missions an objection that looks like jealousy; they think that a man with brilliant gifts coming into the place for a week or two will leave the people discontented with their own pastor. I will not deny that such may sometimes be the case; but if so it has been the fault of the missioner, or of the parish priest, or of both, and not the fault of the thing itself. I once held a mission in a country place, where the incumbent, now passed to his reward, had long laboured without much visible effect. All respected him; many liked him; but he was exceedingly dry and stiff, and his sermons needed an interpreter. It was with some misgivings that I undertook the mission; but after it was over, and he had preached again to his people, one of the laymen in the parish who had been greatly helped by the mission, wrote to me and said, "We never knew until now how much we loved our vicar." No doubt a mission calls forth all that is fatherly in the parish priest himself, and makes the parishioners susceptible as well, and in this double way "turns the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of

the children to their fathers,"—which is just the thing needed to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

One of the great advantages of missions is that there are many things which it is easier for a stranger to say than for the parish priest, and which he can say with more effect. A parish priest, more particularly in a small parish, knows his people too well to speak quite freely. It is dangerous for him, if he sees one man in church whom he knows to be a tippler, to say what he would like to say about tippling; people are not often helped by being preached *at*. The priest knows, on the other hand, that among his most devout people there will be some who will be likely to apply to themselves remarks which were intended for any one rather than them—as, for instance, when he demands a stern self-examination, the persons who will at once take it to heart will be those whom he would wish to do anything rather than to thumb the pages of their conscience. A stranger, who knows nothing of individuals, though he may have been

told of the prevailing faults of a neighbourhood, can speak fearlessly and do no harm. This holds good, not only of formal missions, but of those occasional interchanges of pulpits between the parochial clergy which are so desirable on behalf of all concerned.

It will not be necessary for me here to say in detail how a parish ought to be prepared for work of this kind. Any one who wishes to know should read a little book called "Getting Ready for the Mission," by the Archdeacon of Huddersfield, Mr. Donne, which records what was actually done to prepare the great parish of Limehouse for the General Mission of 1884 in East London. Common sense and a little experience will easily suggest the modifications necessary for preparing a parish in the country, or otherwise dissimilar in its conditions.

All I need say on this matter is, what to Christians is a truism, namely, that all depends upon the force of prayer that has been thrown into the work beforehand—or at least, since God always does "above all we ask or

think," the more prayer has gone before upon the work, the more blessing may be expected to follow. We should always aim at obtaining as copious intercessions as possible, both secret and united, increasing in volume as the time for the effort approaches, and, as far as may be safely done, including detailed prayers for individuals and families, and special streets or districts, according to need,—though, of course, in any prayer-meeting great care has to be taken not to be what people call "personal."

And besides prayers, all legitimate means should be taken—I do not say to excite the people, but to arouse them to expectancy, to make them think that there is a message really coming to themselves from God. Excitement, in the usual sense of the word, is a distracting thing, and would defeat the object in view; but it is desirable to produce something like that solemn stillness which often precedes a refreshing shower of the large drops of summer; then the "showers of blessing" will fall with good effect.

Needless to say that the same calm and solemn

awe should fill the mind of the missioner himself. He must remember—it is the simplest of lessons, yet easily lost sight of—that he *is* on a "mission," and that a mission means a sending, and implies a sender, and that though etymologically it may be called a mission because of the ecclesiastical authority behind the man—which ought always to be expressly sought and conferred—the ecclesiastical authority is itself based upon that of Him who said, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you;" "he that receiveth you, receiveth Me."

This, indeed, is necessary in all preaching; and all preaching is spiritually strong in proportion to the degree in which the preacher realises that he is actually bearing a message from God to God's people. We cannot at all tell what are more important occasions and what less; and it may often happen that more real advance of the kingdom of Christ is to be wrought by an address to three or four people in a cottage than by an oration to thousands under the dome of St. Paul's. In the one case as much as in

the other the consciousness of the Divine Sender ought to be powerful and inspiring. But there is, no doubt, a special degree of awfulness about entering upon a mission in the technical sense of the word. It is a conspicuous challenge to the powers of evil; its failure brings contempt upon the Church of God, and hinders similar efforts for a long time to come. After a mission has been tried upon a parish, there is nothing more to try; and few things are more painful than to see men going to this kind of work with words of levity occasioned by natural high spirits, and with what seems like confidence in themselves — their eloquence, their knowledge, and their experience. These are not the forces before which great mountains become a plain.

A mission preacher should be very clear about the purpose which he sets before himself in his work. There are many good results which will probably flow from it which are not, properly speaking, its object. Probably one of the most marked results of the mission will be the

strengthening of those who are already faithfully serving God. New courage will fill the Church workers, especially in places where the Church has been in a minority. Some who have been content hitherto with serving God for themselves will undertake work for others. Good people will be deepened in their penitence, and uplifted in their aspirations and hopes. Truth will connect itself with truth as the instructions proceed, and many will believe things that they did not believe before, and will know better *why* they believe what they did believe. Many will begin to use laudable and profitable practices to which they were before unaccustomed, and against which perhaps they were prejudiced. By a good mission in a suitable place, the imagination of a whole neighbourhood will be struck; and for years after the inhabitants of the district will talk of the sight, and of what they heard.

But all these are not the direct aim of the missioner, and he will gain these side advantages all the more fully if he sticks to the

one main purpose of a mission. That purpose is plain and serious. He is not sent to charm the people of the place and put them in good-humour, and give them—how often the odious phrase is used—"quite a treat," with dramatic anecdotes and golden periods and racy illustrations. He is not sent to enter into controversy, to make High Churchmen or strong Protestants of them. These things may find a place in what he does and says, or they may not; but if they come in at all, it must be merely by the way and with the utmost care not to interfere with the great aim, the winning of souls. Those who have the first claim upon his time and energy are the greatest sinners of the place, whether well dressed or ill dressed. Whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, it is to them that God is sending him, and he must not be diverted to other things.

If they will not come to hear him in the church, he goes to seek them in their streets, their wharves, their public-houses, their drawing-rooms, or wheresoever he can get at them, and by all

legitimate means. If he has a deep sense of his mission, he will do all with dignity and reverence, not degrading his Master's cause by imitating the vulgarities of some modern sect. The Church Litany sung slowly through the street and really offered as an act of intercession to God, not performed as an advertisement in the eyes of the people, will produce far more effect than more sensational methods, which have practically ceased to draw attention now that their novelty is gone. But howsoever he may go to work, the missioner's object is the same, "that I may by all means save some." The conversion of souls is his business. What thoughts he should set before the people with a view to effecting this, and in what kind of order, I shall hope to treat of in my next chapter. At present I would only insist upon this being steadfastly kept in view as the aim of the work of a mission: not, in the first instance, the building up of the faithful—this is rather the aim of a Parochial Retreat or the like—but the conversion of sinners.

## CHAPTER III

### HOW TO PRODUCE CONVICTION

It will have been gathered from my first chapter that this book is not written to insist upon the necessity of some particular manner of conversion. All open-eyed observers of God's ways must acknowledge that He "turns" men "to" after very various fashions. "The subjective experience of this conversion," says the present Bishop of Durham, "may and does widely vary. To consciousness, it may be gradual, and even imperceptible, or intensely otherwise. But it is essentially one thing in all cases; a forsaking of all else as the man's peace, strength, and aim, in favour of Christ as the power and wisdom of God. . . . The consciousness of conversion is not precisely of the essence of conversion."

I cannot find better words in which to express the truth. The conversion of an infant cannot re-

semble the conversion of a grown man. The conversion of one brought up in the ignorance of heathenism is not likely to resemble that of one brought up in the bosom of the Church, though a stranger to the power of its gospel. We shall expect temperaments, degrees of culture, and the like, to produce an immense diversity of experience in this matter. Emotional, and imaginative, and poetical souls will move in ways which might perhaps be repulsive to those who are more severely governed by reason, or are less elastic in their capacity for joy and grief. One person will realise vividly what it is to be lost and found; another will only be able to believe on sufficient evidence that the facts are so, and with quiet gratitude will act accordingly. A priest whose business it is to seek the conversion of souls will not much mind what may be the special features of any individual case—though he will sympathetically note them all. What he cares to secure is, that the conversion should be genuine; and this is tested, not so much, if at all, by its phenomena at the time, as by its

results afterwards. Nevertheless, as it is obviously impossible for a man to work deliberately for unconscious conversions, or for conversions in a contingent future, what will be said here about the way to go to work will only concern the attempt to bring men to a conscious conversion, and to bring them to it at once.

It is well for those who are taking up work of this kind, frequently to read the lives or the writings of men who have excelled in it, and these of very different sorts. There is at least as much to be learned from those with whom you disagree as from those with whom you agree. Good men's mistakes and exaggerations are allowed to be very useful and instructive to those who come after them.

It is hardly necessary to urge every one who hopes to be able to guide souls into the light to make himself well acquainted with such standard books as St. Austin's *Confessions* and St. Bernard's *De Conversione;* but along with these should be read also, as of almost equal importance, books about which there is more likeli-

hood of opinions differing. Such, for instance, would be the life of St. Francis of Assisi; and that of John Tauler the Dominican, who, after he had long been a celebrated preacher, was taken aside by a godly layman who taught him a more direct and spiritual method of preaching, so that when he began to preach again after a three years' retirement marvellous results followed. With these and their work should be compared that of a very different type of man, St. Francis Xavier, converted by the stern questionings of Ignatius Loyola, and himself the means of converting more souls perhaps than any one other man that ever lived. For those who have to work among English people, it is still more important to study the lives and some of the sermons of the Wesleys and Whitefield—I do not mean only for the extreme historical interest, but to catch, if possible, the secret of their power, while by no means of necessity following all their methods. To these might well be added that strangely stimulating though hardly attractive book, the autobiography of Charles Finney,

the American revivalist. Of course there are a great many other lives and many collections of sermons which are suggestive and useful for the purpose, but I will not linger over a list which would soon become too long.

More, perhaps, will be gained by actually watching, if opportunity is given, a mission conducted by some well-known evangelist, than by any study of books. Probably no man will be able to adopt altogether any other man's way of working. As David can make nothing of Saul's armour, so would Saul probably have made nothing of David's; but it is always well to observe, and to gain hints. I would not call any one an enemy who seeks in any form to draw souls to God, but *fas est et ab hoste doceri.*

Probably the first question that arises in connection with any public effort at evangelisation turns upon the function of excitement in matters of religion. I should be sorry to pronounce a sweeping condemnation of all excitement and everywhere. It seems to me very probable that there are some natures so phlegmatic or so be-

sotted that without a good deal of excitement they may be incapable of taking in a quickening truth. I should not at all wonder if it might not do good in some places, before a mission, to spend a little while in merely trying to rouse attention,—just as a travelling circus parades a country town with a brass band and piebald horses before settling down to the business that pays. A most kindly-hearted lady once told me that in her part of the world the people were so slow that, if you wanted to ask a man the way, the best plan was to begin to shout and wave your arms as soon as you came in sight of him; and that then there would be some chance that when you reached him he might be wide enough awake to understand your question. Something of the sort may well be applied in spiritual concerns. "He that telleth a tale to a fool," says the son of Sirach, "speaketh to one in a slumber; when he hath told his tale, he will say, What is the matter?" Anything that will make the fool ask, "What is the matter?" before you begin your tale is likely to be beneficial.

There are places where one would almost wish to run through the village crying "Fire" or "Murder"; or go round, like a Romanist clergyman in Ireland, with a whip; or take the people by the shoulders and shake them, or use any startling and sensational method, so as to dispel the dulness of apathy before beginning work.

But it is not every place where rousing is required, and the places where the people are most inclined to sensational methods are those where they are least wholesome; and in any case such advertisements could only be profitable as a *protreptic*—a thing to get the people into a state of receptivity. The excitement can no more convert the soul and provide it with the satisfaction of its needs than the dinner-bell can take the place of the dinner.

And this seems to me the cause of a great many failures in evangelistic work. Notoriously, excitement has been too much relied upon, and it has been allowed to push beyond its proper place. It was so with the work of John

Wesley, especially at the beginning. Converts of his fell back by the score and by the hundred, within a few weeks of what was supposed to be their conversion. It is quite appalling to read the statistics of relapse. He leaves, for instance, eight hundred members of his society at Newcastle at the end of one December, and on revisiting them in February finds that seventy-six have fallen away, and has to dismiss sixty-four more. Why was this? It was no doubt the natural consequence of his method of encouraging his audience to fall into fits, mistaking the psychical for the spiritual, and hysterics for the Holy Ghost.

A little experience of the development of this method in Cornwall would be enough to undeceive any who were inclined to favour it. In one place, a Methodist said that he preferred the revivals at the Bryanite Chapel to those at the Wesleyan (or *vice versâ*, I forget which), because at the one place you could sometimes hear a little of what was being said, while at the other you could hear nothing, the uproar was too great.

I myself have seen, in a revival which was supposed to be going on under Church control, a room in similar uproar, and a poor body rocking backwards and forwards in intense effort, surrounded by persons of experience clamouring to her, as they swayed with her swayings, "Say, I yield; only say, I yield;" and at last she said it, and rose up and made the round of the room with smiles to receive the congratulations of her friends. There seemed to me, looking upon it with eyes which desired to be as sympathetic as possible, to be no difference between this and the religious methods of the Dervish.

The old Mr. Robert Aitken, for whose memory I have the most sincere regard, in some cases fostered the same kind of psychical excitement. The only time I ever heard him speak, he was holding a mission in a London church, and I went in for a short time while waiting for a train. I do not think he said anything else while I was there, but to cry in thrilling tones, as he flung himself to and fro almost over the side of the pulpit, with both

hands uplifted and shaking, "My dears, I love you, I love you; my dears, I love you," and to call repeatedly upon the name of our Lord. It was most earnest and sincere, not in the least affected or theatrical, and no one could listen to it without being impressed. Minds that were already sufficiently stored with Christian ideas might need nothing more than the shock of such impressions to make them believe with a formed faith and take all right resolutions; there was no doubt an intense power of the Holy Ghost present in it all; yet there was no instruction, no Gospel. It was more like the speaking with tongues than prophesying,—calculated to arrest the attention, but not to enlighten the mind and conscience, or to direct the will. It was the same thing in Mr. Aitken's after-meetings. A young man, a friend of mine, went to one of them, and the good old man took him by the shoulders and literally shook him, and tried to get him to say, "Glory be to God." The man, though ready enough to say the words at another time, respectfully refused to do it then, because

he could not at the moment mean by them all that Mr. Aitken wanted him to mean.

It is obvious upon reflection, and still more obvious when the result is seen, that excitement of this kind is not merely useless, but positively harmful. I do not deny that some are truly and lastingly converted by it. Here and there heated revivalism produces a good result. But as a whole, it is pernicious. It is like trawling, which, while it catches good fish, crushes at the bottom of the sea as many as it catches, and drives the fish off the ground. The fishers of men are not wise to use it. In those parts of the country where people are accustomed to it, you will find that in the most godless towns and villages almost all the grown men and women look upon themselves as having been at one time converted, and acquiesce in being what they call backsliders. No people in the world are more difficult to move than these. To use a phrase which is terribly significant, they are "gospel-hardened." The instinctive Calvinism of human nature makes them say to themselves, either that

having once been in grace they will be sure to be brought back into it, or that having lost what once they had, they can never regain it. Practically the effect is the same. They come and sit with folded arms at the back of chapel or church when a revival or mission is going on, waiting idly to see if by chance the old feeling will come over them again, as the tide rises over a stone. And the same thing happens in the case of the young people growing up. Accustomed to suppose that conversion consists of an intense inward emotion which they have heard described, and which they have not yet experienced, they wait for it to "take" them.

I ask a young man in the west country whether he "tells his prayers." He says no. I ask why not. He answers, "I suppose if I be to pray, the mind will take me." It actually becomes a point of religion and conscience *not* to pray, even when every natural feeling would demand it. A girl for instance is dying upstairs, and I am shown into a parlour downstairs with her brother, a man of twenty-eight, and of good character.

The girl is said to be too ill for me to see her—perhaps partly because the Bryanites have been exhausting what strength she had—and so I say to the brother, "Well, at any rate we can pray *for* her, if we cannot pray *with* her." I kneel down, but he makes no sign. Thinking that perhaps he considers me so hopelessly sinful and mistaken that he can hold no religious communion with me, I say, "Will you not join with me in prayer for your sister's salvation?" His answer is, "I can go to my knees, if you like; but I'm not a religious man."

And well would it be if the only harm ensuing from this passive waiting for sensible conversions were the negative harm of not using religious exercises. But that is not the only effect. Given the doctrine that an unconverted man is damned in any case, while conversion blots out all sins alike, the result upon the morals of the young may be imagined. A young woman was seduced while in the service of a dissenting local preacher, himself a godly and excellent man. The parish priest went to him

about it, and said he hoped that he would either speak to the girl about her sin himself, or allow the priest to do so. "Her sin, sir," said the preacher; "her sin? why, she was not a professor." And when to the belief that it does not matter how a man lives before he is converted, because he is sure to be lost, is added, as is too frequently the case, the belief that it does not matter how a man lives after he is converted, because he is sure to be saved, a simple lover of scriptural holiness may well maintain to himself, even if he never expresses it, that no heresy that ever afflicted the Church — not Arianism, nor Nestorianism, nor Eutychianism,—not Papal Infallibility, and Mariolatry, and Indulgences— has proved so soul-destroying a heresy as the spurious conversionism which makes it a sin for an unconverted man to pray, but takes no count of carnal vices.

No, true conversion will often bring with it a white heat of emotion and excitement, and it may not be necessary to attempt to check it, —although it may be necessary to give warning

about the inevitable reaction that must follow; but no wise evangelist, in my judgment, will set himself consciously to produce it. If it comes as the result of sober teaching, well and good. I have seen a man, whom I had previously known as a somewhat impassive and reserved person, stagger and call out in the village street in broad daylight in a way that made me suppose him to be very drunk,—and this the result of the quietest of sermons the night before, believed and laid hold of in secret; and the man has now gone on steadily for years in sober Church ways; but I could not encourage any one to *aim* at effecting this intoxication.

It seems clear that the only true and legitimate weapon and instrument for converting souls is the preaching of the Gospel of God. Only by rational means can we hope to change the wills of rational beings. Of course one who feels deeply the truth of what he utters will necessarily evince it by fervour in his tones of voice and other ways, even though he may chasten and restrain his expression; but he will rely mainly

upon the *matter* of his discourse to work what he desires, and not upon the *manner*. St. Paul's way was to commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God; and this is still the true way. In reliance upon the Holy Spirit, who alone can supply the evangelist with the right thoughts, arranged in the right order, and illustrated and enforced so as to move and draw, and who alone can open the hearts of the people to take in what is said, the evangelist endeavours to awaken men and bring them into the right relation with God by pressing upon them the plain meaning of facts.

What, then, are the facts upon which it is most important to dwell, with a view to the conversion of souls, and in what order ought they to be taken?

Here, I believe, it is very easy to go wrong and to make mistakes. Preachers often insist upon topics which are powerless to produce conviction or peace, though they may be very interesting in themselves; and they often start with subjects which would have been better treated at a later

point. In a town where a mission was going on, a young man of my acquaintance, who had begun to be anxious about his soul, went into one of the churches on the first evening and heard a lecture on the powerlessness of Buddhism to cause a sense of sin, because of the absence of belief in a personal God. The point was in itself a good one, and it was well argued: as an illustration, it would have been excellent; but instead of pressing home as the great subject of the sermon the existence of a living God, and then the responsibility of the persons there present towards that living God, the preacher only showed conclusively the defects of the Buddhist system, and left the hearers to apply what they had heard to themselves as best they might.

The young man came away but little helped; and he went on to a neighbouring church, where a well-known missioner was opening his mission with a discourse on the certainty of death and the folly of ignoring it. This, too, was well put; but the young man felt for himself that it met no want of his own soul, and that the

congregation, on that first night of the mission, did not appear to be of the sort who were forgetful of the issues of life, but that both they and he needed something more positive, something to attract and draw the soul out.

When I was a deacon, I attended a three days' convention of devout persons for the purpose of encouraging the work of sanctification. In connection with this convention "evangelistic" meetings were held each evening, to which the townspeople were invited. I remember how my heart grew hot within me, as on each evening, one speaker after another at these "evangelistic" meetings stood up and spoke about the wages of sin and the like, but I heard no Gospel preached. Those stern truths were not to be forgotten; but there were other things which needed to be said first.

Modern Christianity owes a great debt of gratitude to Coleridge, who, without being a professed theologian, did more than most theologians to lead in the direction of a true and rich and Catholic view of God and man. But there is

an often-quoted sentence of his which, without being interpreted, perhaps even interpreted away, would be as mischievous as a sentence well could be. "It is," he says, "the fundamental article of Christianity that I am a fallen creature." The sentence is the preface to a statement about original sin, which is as true as it is awful; but the sentence itself is irreconcileable with the noble religious philosophy of its author, and, at any rate, irreconcileable with the Bible.

In the first place, "the fundamental article" of Christianity is surely a statement about God, not a statement about man; and if instead of "the fundamental article of Christianity" we were to say "the fundamental article of the Christian doctrine of man," the sentence is still not true, except that it implies and involves something which it does not state. "The fundamental article" of the Christian doctrine about man is concerned with what man was originally created to be, and may again become through Christ, not with what man has made himself by sin. It is, indeed, a part of the Gospel, and a very

important part, to tell man that he is a fallen creature; but not altogether for the reason assigned by Coleridge, or insisted upon by those who most often quote this language of his. It is a Gospel, because, as Bishop Westcott has said so admirably, "No view of life can be so inexpressibly sad as that which denies the Fall. If evil belongs to man as man, there appears to be no prospect of relief here or hereafter. There can be nothing in us to drive out that which is part of ourselves." But to say this is to say that there is an article in the Christian doctrine about man which is more fundamental than the doctrine that he is fallen, namely, the doctrine that he was created by a good and holy God in His own image and after His likeness, which gives a hope that, though fallen, he is capable of restoration.

I believe, therefore, that an evangelist not only commits a theological mistake, but throws away an important opportunity, and is in danger of actually repelling and alienating souls if he begins his work by dwelling upon sin and its conse-

quences. It is more profitable in most cases, as well as more true, to begin with that which is inviting, and attractive, and hopeful. It may sometimes be best to begin with very general subjects, like "Ho! every one that thirsteth," or with some touching incidents in the life of our Lord, in order to gain a hearing. Where people are very suspicious of a stranger, and of new-fangled ways, and think he may be a Jesuit in disguise, or something equally dreadful, it is worth while to spend quite a long time in simply gaining their confidence. There are places where, in a mission, nothing much is to be expected for about a week, until the people are able to see that the missioner has no intention of pressing anything upon them but what, as St. Paul says, they "either read or acknowledge." After that almost anything may be done.

The first distinct step, then, towards producing that conviction of sin which leads on to a full conversion, is to set forth as powerfully as may be the reality of God's existence and presence. There is a great deal of practical

atheism concealed, even from the men in whom it is found, under orthodox forms. Anything that will make God a living and present reality to people's minds is likely to have far more effect in arousing conscience than any number of sermons about hell and death and judgment, which have not been prepared for by such teaching about God. Many who read these pages will know that choice little book called "The Practice of the Presence of God," and will remember how the simple Brother Lawrence there ascribes the beginning of his conversion to gazing upon a hawthorn tree in winter, and reflecting upon the change which spring would work upon it. We want to make people feel that the Lord is burning in every bush to-day, as much as He was in the bush of Moses. *Omnia exeunt in mysterium.* If we can only lead them to pause and think upon the mystery of their own being, or of any other being, the rest can hardly help following. "He that wondereth shall reign, and he that reigneth shall rest."

It is easy, when the reality of God's pre-

sence is discerned, to bring out — I do not mean scholastically, but popularly — the character of God, His love for every soul, His terrible holiness, which made Isaiah cry out that he was undone because he had seen the Lord, and the righteous Job abhor himself and repent in dust and ashes. That lesson from the failure of Buddhism, of which I spoke just now, comes in to great advantage. Those who would convince men of sin must try to bring them into the presence of a living God, and set their secret sins in the light of His countenance. When men have been brought to feel that God is not a formula or an unpractical speculation, but a personal being with whom they have had to do all their lives, have to do now, will have to do hereafter—one who loves them with a father's love, and has given them all that they possess, and is earnestly desirous of having love returned for love, then there is a good opening made for plying the conscience with a sense of ingratitude and unfilial disobedience, which we ought not to be slow to seize.

A more useful thing can hardly be done, even in a parochial ministry, than at not too frequent intervals to give people definite instructions on the Ten Commandments with a view to awakening the conscience. Uneducated people find it hard to examine themselves, and books do not help them much that way; but it is wonderful what an effect is produced by a systematic and thorough exposition of the commandments, with plain and homely illustrations. In every mission the attempt should be made to grapple with the conscience of the people by going through the commandments in after meetings. It must be done as tenderly as possible, and with great care not to do harm or suggest bad thoughts by the way in which any of the ten is handled, but with sufficient fulness and in broad outlines.

Everywhere the same testimony is borne to the convicting power of the Decalogue. In one place a dissenting preacher, who had heard a consecutive exposition of it in a mission, said to the missioner, "I see one mistake that

we have made in our chapels: we have spoken a great deal to our people about *sin*, but we have not said nearly enough about *sins*." "It was not the preaching that did it," said a woman who had been really converted, after having long been satisfied with something far short of it, "it was those commandments." Another, who had been a class leader and the life of the dissenting party in a place—the only one who had refused beforehand to have anything to do with the mission — went home after the first time of attending and, striking her hand upon the table, said to her husband, "I have heard to-night what all my life I have wanted to hear; I never knew before what penitence was."

Meanwhile, the preacher must endeavour in his sermons, by every means in his power, to drive home the sense of sin. In some places this will be much easier to do than in others. It is curious, from one point of view—from another point of view, it is a gracious dispensation of God—how a sympathy springs up between the preacher and a congregation as a whole, by

which he can see how they are taking what he says, and knows when it is best to continue some line of persuasion and when to interrupt it. He desires to see signs of breaking down, not necessarily with tears; but to see the traces of levity, or of self-satisfaction, or of criticism, or of mere admiration pass away, and awe and worship take its place.

It is often good to tear to pieces the common excuses that men make for their sinful lives: that they have harmed nobody but themselves; that they did not see that there was any harm in what they did; that everybody does the same; that they couldn't help it; that it was a long time ago, and that bygones should be bygones, and the like. To shew how such excuses will look at the judgment-day brings great conviction with it. It is well to bring out in its proper place what I have said ought not to be made the fundamental article of Christianity, but which is most true nevertheless, that each human being is a fallen and guilty thing by the very fact of participation in a common nature and sharing

the life of a sinful race. But this might be claimed as rather a misfortune than a fault; therefore the preacher must dwell upon all that makes sin so very sinful; how it has been committed in spite of the remonstrances of conscience; and if conscience did not remonstrate because it was too dull, how wrong it was not to have used the means of stimulating conscience,—the word of God read and preached, and the private instructions of the clergy;—how, in spite of native feebleness and inherited propensities, man has still a freedom of will to choose between right and wrong, and does nothing but what he is justly held responsible for; how God has met the plea of moral impotence by supplying all the forces of grace to those who are willing to receive them, so that any Christian who falls into sin is convicted of not having really struggled with his temptation to the end as Christ struggled; how peculiarly base sin in a Christian is, because it is not only a sin against light, but against love—a love known and experienced.

It may be necessary even to denounce occasion-

ally, and to speak plainly, though it should be with great solemnity and without rhetoric, of our Lord's teaching about hell. Occasionally things happen which call for a real outburst of holy anger. But even when he feels bound to be most stern, a true evangelist will always long, like St. Paul addressing the Galatians, to "change his voice," and will let the people see that he longs to do so. He will make it plain that it is love which makes him speak so sharply, like Him who subjoins to His eight tremendous woes those words of unutterable pity and tenderness, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." He will take care not to let any discourse consist of nothing but rebuke. The most scathing rebukes and threats in the Apocalypse, "Thou knowest not that thou art the miserable, and wretched, and poor, and blind, and naked one;" "I will spue thee out of My mouth," are followed by the loveliest and most winning of all the promises, "I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me." There must be a continual blending of the message of mercy with the message of wrath,

or the message of wrath will fail of its purpose. Men are not generally much helped by being scolded; they resent it; but they are for the most part wonderfully grateful for being dealt with faithfully, by one who shews in everything that he does and says, that he only wounds in order to heal, and breaks down in order to build up.

It is indeed of little use to preach a Saviour to those who do not recognise at heart that they need one. To proclaim the forgiveness of sins has little effect on those whose consciences have never accused them. The hopes of deliverance from sin are hopes which do not appeal to men who have never wrestled against temptation. We must therefore do all we can to revive conscience to perform its function healthily, and this will best be done by proceeding throughout upon the assumption that the sinner whom we are endeavouring to convict is the child, the beloved child, of God and not His enemy, and that there is still the filial instinct within him that will vibrate to the message of the Father if only it can be reached.

## CHAPTER IV

### HOW TO DEAL WITH NEWLY AWAKENED SOULS

THE subject of my last chapter was how to go to work in order to produce conviction of sin—such a conviction of sin as makes men seriously anxious about their own salvation. Supposing conviction to have been reached, I now proceed to consider what should be done to help men into the peace and light in which God would have them walk.

Perhaps I may say, before going any further, that this is a stage of spiritual experience through which it is not advisable to hurry. Some will remain longer than others under conviction of sin before finding rest for their souls. Brother Lawrence said that he was fourteen years in finding it. The blessed George Herbert speaks of his whole volume of poems as containing "a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have

passed between God and my soul, before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus my Master, in whose service I have now found perfect freedom." Poor Billy Bray, the Cornish enthusiast, whose life, under the title of "The King's Son," is very well worth a careful reading, was many days before his conversion issued in the joy of pardon. It will do little harm for the iron to enter deep into the soul; and, as Billy Bray said while in that painful condition, "I would rather be crying for mercy than living in sin. I was glad that I had begun to seek the Lord, for it is said, Let the heart of him rejoice that seeketh the Lord."

But when men are pricked in their heart and begin to ask, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" "What shall I do to be saved?" a Christian minister ought to know what kind of answer to give; and as this will often happen, not only in conducting missions and the like, but in the experience of ordinary parochial life, it may not be amiss to spend some time in considering the answer.

In one sense the answer is already provided

for us by the Apostles St. Paul and St. Peter, —the former replying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," — the latter, "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ into the remission of sins." But this advice will need expansion and application to circumstances; people will need to know what "believe" and "repent" mean in their cases, and what St. Peter's answer will involve for men who have already been baptized, and so forth; and in fact the words as they stand are, no doubt, the summary of much more explicit directions actually given by the Apostles, as we can see from what these inquirers went on to do. What then will you tell a person to do who is in distress about his soul, and does not know which way to turn?

I do not know that you could take for your guidance, or your inquirer's, anything more suggestive or useful than the account given us in the book of Genesis of Jacob's wrestling. Many and many a time I have known the reading of that

passage, and the imitation of Jacob's action, bring souls into the desired peace. And I suppose I need not advise my readers to make themselves acquainted with the powerful poem which Charles Wesley founded upon the incident, beginning—

> "Come, O Thou Traveller unknown,
> Whom still I hold but cannot see;
> My company before is gone,
> And I am left alone with Thee.
> With Thee all night I mean to stay,
> And wrestle till the break of day."

This, then, is the first advice which I should give to a person under conviction of not yet being right with God—of not yet possessing what he sees that others enjoy of spiritual peace and comfort—of being still under guilt and condemnation. After speaking everything that I could speak of encouragement and promise, based on the love of God, and the atonement made by Christ, and praying earnestly with him and for him, I should advise him to go somewhere all alone, and have it out by himself. There are some persons who will expect a spiritual guide to be able to do the whole thing for them, and to take them and set

them in the right condition, without effort of their own. But this is impossible. No man can reveal Christ to another; he can only so speak of Christ as to teach another how to go and find Christ for himself.

The seeker must go apart for this purpose,—as it is said of Jacob, "He rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two women servants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok; and he took them and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had; and Jacob was left alone." Solitude is almost a necessity. I do not say that it is impossible for the work to be done where there are other people by, for there are many instances to the contrary; but at any rate, the most solid, lasting, and satisfactory work is that which is done without any eye observing except the eyes of the angels. Dear as Rachel was to Jacob, not even she was allowed to be near him in the conflict through which he was called to pass. St. Austin tells us how on that eventful day at Milan he first began the struggle in company with his

friend Alypius, because the two were so united in heart that neither felt any embarrassment in the presence of the other; but he soon found himself obliged to quit even that sympathetic presence, and to withdraw under the fig-tree, where he could prostrate himself before God unseen and unheard. So it has been in the case of most men whose conversion has been recorded. They have been forced to go apart from friends, relatives, husbands and wives, religious ministers, and everyone else, and seek God all alone.

This, then, is the first thing to advise—to set apart a time, a sufficiently long time, for making a great spiritual effort. There may be difficulties both as to time and as to place. It will need thought and contrivance; Jacob used thought and contrivance to secure that solitude. Night is probably the best time, as it was with Jacob; or advantage may be taken of an early closing day, or of a Sunday. And as to place, those who have their own quiet private apartments sometimes forget how small a proportion of mankind has a like privilege. A thoughtful

young fellow once told me that there was no one thing for which he so much longed as to have a room of his own—describing graphically what happened if he tried to retire into the bedroom which he shared with another—how the partner of the room would come and ask what he was doing there so long by himself, or would be sure to want to fetch a brush or something, and there was no possibility of locking the door. We all know how for any important study or prayer we need not only immunity from interruption, but also immunity from the *fear* of interruption. To such persons it is well to suggest the kind of places where they may be quiet. In the country there are always lanes, and fields, and woods, and hills. In towns, though the street is not a place where a man can kneel or use any freedom of gesture, he may yet make himself much alone in walking briskly through a crowd. Many a heaven-reaching prayer has been offered in such circumstances. Then there are open churches in many places, and I would to God that there were open

churches everywhere; in London it is a comfort and a joy to see how increasingly the churches that are left open are used by young men, and old men too, for private prayer. And sometimes a clergyman can hardly do a kinder thing for a man who has no facilities at home, than to put a room at his disposal for a time, that he may gain his opportunity of undisturbed solitude upon which so much depends. But whenever and wherever it may be, some devout retirement is the first thing to urge; and where there's a will there's a way.

And what next? That young man who so earnestly longed for a room of his own put the matter in this simple epigram, "When you're with other people, I think you're alone; but directly you're alone, you're not alone." He knew what it was to find what Jacob found. "Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him." When solitude has been gained, then the seeker must recollect that he is in the presence of Christ. Christ will probably give some indication of His presence, and be the first

to begin the wrestling, as in the story of Jacob. But if not, the seeker must challenge Him. It is not necessary that he should all at once, and at the outset, be keenly conscious of Christ's presence, or deeply moved at the thought of it. All that he needs is to remember that it is there. He may sit still, or kneel silently, and remember that so it is. He does not create that presence by recognising it, nor could he banish it by ignoring or despising it. Whether he feels Christ to be near or not, he believes, he knows, that Christ is near. If need be, he can argue the point with himself. But what has been to him hitherto but a matter of opinion, an orthodox proposition, is to be made a reality and an experience by personal endeavour; and the more calmly and reasonably he can set about it the better. "Here am I, and here is the living Christ."

Is it necessary to say what a man should do when that point is clearly settled? Obviously, he must close with Him at once. There is no distance to be traversed; no need to go up into heaven to fetch Christ down again, or to go down

into the deep to bring Him up from the dead; no pilgrimage to any specially favoured resort; for here He is—the very same Christ who walked in Galilee, and who said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour," and who expostulated, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life."

Perhaps the seeker may tell you that he does not know what to say or how to begin. There are many people who have never prayed, except to repeat a formula which has been taught them by rote. But the difficulty will soon vanish when the man is really awakened, and believes himself to be alone with Christ. The Bishop of St. Andrews told me that once, in the after meeting at a mission, he told a man who had been much struck to kneel down and pray. "But," said the man, "I never said a prayer in my life, and I don't know what to say." "Then," said the missioner, "kneel down and say to Christ what you have just told me, 'O Lord, I have never said a prayer in my life, and I do not know what to say;'" and

presently he had to go back to the man and tell him to pray in silence, because he had burst into a perfect torrent of prayer, and was confessing all his sins aloud, so that the other people in the church were disturbed.

It is not a difficult thing to begin. You may tell a man to begin, and indeed to continue, if he finds nothing more to say, by simply calling upon our Lord by His name, "Jesu; Jesu; Jesu." It is a powerful prayer. There is nothing which it does not include. It is an act of faith, and an act of penitence; a thanksgiving and an urgent petition. If the man never gets beyond it, he is safe if he dies with that cry upon his lips and in his heart; for "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Often when the Christian is long past the earlier stages of his spiritual history, he finds that nothing is more rewarding, or brings a more uplifting and assuring sense of union with our Lord, than this calling upon the name of our Lord, and waiting upon Him for His gracious reply.

But of course it is not enough for the purpose

of a true conversion to name that name listlessly and dreamily. The man must be determined to *wrestle*, like Jacob. Every faculty will have to be roused and brought to bear upon the one great object. The mind must be called back from wandering thoughts, and fixed and concentrated, and even the body—though in the course of the long struggle it may be necessary to give it occasional repose—will be strained and taxed, coerced into wakefulness and attention. There must be no half-heartedness about the work. God makes abundant promises to seekers after Him, but only to those who seek in earnest. "Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you; and ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart."

Such wrestling as this is difficult to maintain. No one can tell at the beginning how long it may have to be continued. The blessing that is sought may perhaps be given almost before it is asked; or there may be hours, nights and days, weeks of ever-renewed

wrestlings, before it is given. Importunity is a great proof of earnestness, and the Gospels contain many encouragements to importunity in prayers. One who is unaccustomed to such exercise may find it very hard work; and it not unfrequently happens, as happened with Jacob, that in the wrestlings God will touch, as it were, the hollow of the thigh—the very pivot of the wrestler's strength—and lame it, so that all natural power seems to go, and the contest becomes not only wearisome, but painful and distressing. It may seem as if God would daunt the soul, and endeavour to make it leave off trying. "Let Me go, for the day breaketh." But then is the time when victory is near, and the seeker must be resolved to answer, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

When souls are really in earnest, we need not fear but that the Holy Spirit, which helpeth our infirmities, and maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered, will supply what is lacking, when a man knows not what he should pray for as he ought. But it

may be well to suggest the kind of pleas which the seeker may urge. That beautiful hymn, "When at Thy footstool, Lord, I bend," would suggest many. There is the very honour of God Himself, and all the "plighted promises" in His holy Word, which can be shown Him in black and white, so to speak, and in which it is impossible for God to lie. He is a Creator; He cannot allow His creature to be torn away from Him, calling upon Him all the time. He is a Father; He will not be so unnatural as to refuse to listen to a pleading son. He loves His only begotten Son: He gave Him for the salvation of sinners; He cannot allow that precious Blood to be in vain for those who take refuge in it. The very sinfulness of the supplicant may be turned into a plea; God, who is holy, cannot endure sin in anything, and yet there is no way of being rid of sin unless He will show mercy and pity. The more sinful the supplicant has been, the more will God be exalted by his conversion. Again, He has already done so much for the

soul that He cannot stultify Himself by now leaving it to perish when it begins to respond to His goodness.

This last is a matter of much importance. It is always the tendency with those who are brought, more or less suddenly, to a realisation of spiritual things after some years of neglect or unbelief or formalism, to disparage what had been done for them before. This is to dishonour God; and it is to lose one of the most cogent pleas which God permits us to press Him with. My baptism is no credit to me, no merit of mine; but it is a sign and proof of God's love and electing grace towards me, long before I thought of seeking Him for myself. Being baptized, I can plead with Him by grace already given. Even if a prodigal son, I am a son, not only in the sense in which all men are His sons, but as being united with the Only-begotten. Being confirmed, I can plead with Him as having received, however blindly and unworthily, the earnest of His Holy Spirit, which engages the Giver to follow up

the earnest with a richer abundance of the gift. Everything which God has done for me in the past becomes a reason why He should do for me this thing which now I seek, and without which all previous gifts and loving-kindnesses will lose their effect. I dare not come to Him as one for whom He has as yet done nothing; but rather I come with thanksgivings that the Lord hath done great things for me already, of which I am only now, perhaps, beginning to discern the value. And the very fact that now I am seeking God in earnest is a proof that His mercy has not altogether left me; for I could not even desire to draw near to Him, if He were not first drawing me.

These and many other holy arguments with God will, no doubt, be brought to mind by the Holy Spirit, when a man is resolute in saying, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." But if we follow the narrative of the patriarch's wrestling, we shall see that at this very point, when his faith seems prepared to carry everything before it, his Antagonist again strikes him

what seems a cruel and terrible blow—worse than that touch which made him feel the nothingness of his natural powers.

"And He said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob." He makes the man, once in life at least, steadily contemplate, and take in at a comprehensive glance, exactly what he is. "What is thy name?" Who art thou that darest to wrestle thus confidently, to demand thus imperiously the blessing of God? The question brings him down from his soaring spiritual flights, and lays him in the dust. His name sums up his character. It is his confession, the history of his moral life, to repeat it. "My name is Jacob." All the basenesses and treacheries of his past years come up to mind as he avows his name. He stands on the eve of meeting the brother whom he had twice supplanted, and does not yet know what that brother's feeling towards him is. The consequences of his sin stare him in the face. He had been driven to seek this solitary communing

with God by the fear of meeting Esau, and it must have seemed hard to be made to taste still more the hatefulness of what he was by nature, and what he had made himself by consent. But it was necessary if his soul was to be perfectly healed, and if the blessing which he sought so earnestly was to have its full effect.

And so it is almost always. Those who are seeking God and a true conversion will not be allowed to remember their sins just as much or as little as they please. It is a conviction of not being justified or clean which drives them to God; but the conviction will be made more poignant before they have done with it. They will be forced to see themselves in something of the way in which God sees them, and to take in the unwelcome truth about their own characters and their own deeds. It is good and wholesome that it should be so; and they will learn to bless God for the purgatory of fire through which He makes them to pass, when before giving them the blessing He makes them confess their own names.

For we must observe how the blessing all depends upon the thoroughness with which the soul adopts a right moral attitude. Conversion is indeed a turning to God Himself, but for that very reason it is a turning away from sin. "Come unto Me," says our Lord, "and I will give you rest;" and then He names the condition; "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." There is no true peace in forgiveness until there is "an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart."

This was the case with St. Austin. God brought him to recognise, what he would not recognise before, the sinfulness of his sensual life. "Thou didst take me from behind my own back, and didst set me before my face," and then came that terrible struggle to see whether he could give it up or not; "Now, now. Why not now?" It is very instructive to observe what the message was that finally brought him into peace. It was not some gracious promise of forgiveness or welcome, or some heart-satisfying doctrine about the blood

of Christ, to which his attention was called, as he lay weeping, by the mysterious *Tolle, lege*. The text was a sharp summons to put his sin away and have done with it. "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." "No further did I read," he says, "nor needed I; but with a calm countenance I made the matter known to Alypius." His sin had received its final death-blow, and he passed into the perfect peace of God by his unhesitating and unconditional submission to the moral law of Christ.

There can, of course, be no peace with God while the heart is allowed to go wandering after sinful desires and clinging to them; but where there is the unfeigned and contrite acknowledgment of the past, there is also the promise of a new and blessed future; "Thy name shall be no more called Jacob, but Israel; because as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."

These are great things to hold out before the soul which has learned to be anxious about its state, and is ready to be guided into the way of peace. It is much that solitude, and recollection of Christ's presence, and prayerful wrestlings and pleadings, should, with perseverance, bring the forgiveness of a guilty past and the promise of a noble future. But there is only one way in which that noble future can be really assured. It is by the direct knowledge of Christ, diligently striven after and diligently cultivated. And therefore Israel's last demand is, after all, the demand which we should instruct anxious souls to make, even if they should forget all else. "And Jacob asked Him and said, Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name." Pardon, and holiness, and the rest of the Divine blessings are not gifts which Christ gives, apart from Himself; they are included in His very person, and that is, in fact, the one thing towards which all the wrestling should make—the knowledge of Christ.

We want nothing else instead of Him; we want

Him. If He should offer us anything else short of Himself, it must be set aside; He is proving us, to see whether we are bent upon reaching the highest. Some will perhaps remember an anecdote in the life of St. Francis of Assisi, how one night one of the brethren feigned to be asleep or hid behind a door in order to observe the prayers of his master; and all night St. Francis was pacing up and down or prostrating himself on the ground, saying nothing else but this, with pauses of silence, as if waiting for an answer, "Who art Thou, gracious Lord; who art Thou?" and sometimes adding, "And what am I, a sinful worm, Thy creature?" It is the coming to Christ, the finding of Christ, the knowledge of Christ, the entering into a living experience of personal intercourse with Christ, which is the one thing needed. None but the penitent and the obedient can obtain this gift; but for them it is certain, if they will seek it diligently.

And if our inquirers ask us beforehand how they shall know when they have gained what

we are teaching them to seek, we need not be careful to answer. They will know well enough when they have gained it. When Jacob asked his opponent, "Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name," he was not told it. "He said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name?" In one sense the name could not be told. The name of Christ is only gradually learned by the experience of an eternity of His teaching and His bounties. In another sense, for the purpose of identification, Jacob knew the name already, and there was no need to ask it. "He blessed him there; and Jacob called the name of that place Peniel; for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Men do not wrestle with Christ in faithful prayer, and find themselves uncertain at the end whether they have grasped Him or not.

I believe that if we tell earnest inquirers to seek Christ for themselves after something of the method which I have roughly sketched, they will not fail of their object. To be alone, alone with Christ; to close with Him, con-

centrating all the faculties upon discerning Him; to confess to Him with a true purpose of serving Him; to wrestle on, refusing to take a refusal; these are the steps. I do not say that there are no other steps by which the end may be reached, but these are simple and easy to take. An elderly man—a labourer—came to see me one morning, and sat down, his quaintly-chiselled face twitching into smiles that looked more like amusement than anything else. I asked him if there was anything I could do for him, but he said no. Presently he said, "I did what you told us to do last night." I had been speaking about Jacob wrestling. "And you found what you wanted, did you, John?" He only burst out into a long peal of laughter and said, "Yes, I did." I saw him again eleven years after, and he had not lost the mirth which the finding of Christ had brought him, though it had become deeper and more quiet.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PLACE OF CONFESSION IN CONVERSION

Incidentally, in my last chapter, I spoke of the confession which cannot but come to the lips of every one who is wrestling with God for the blessing of knowing Him. No one can long go on pleading with God for that gift of gifts without being reminded, as Jacob was, of his unworthiness to ask it. But such a confession as can be made there and then is scarcely more than parenthetic. The soul is obliged to press on; nor can it, for other reasons, make so full and deep a confession then as it learns to make afterwards. The confession made in the crisis of the struggle, however contrite and humble, is intuitive, general, and comprehensive. That one glance by which Jacob gathers up all his past in the utterance of his name, may be like the glance in which they say that a man

drowning or falling over a cliff sees all that he has ever done; but afterwards he will need to examine himself more leisurely and in detail.

And, indeed, a man can hardly see, in the anguish of that first contest, the true sinfulness of his sin. It is the greatest mistake to suppose that penitence is a transitory condition leading up to forgiveness and then ceasing. We all know that it is when forgiveness is fairly well assured that penitence is most felt. So long as a man is greatly disquieted about his own salvation there is a disturbing element which hinders the simplicity of his repentance, because while he is partly acting in his own interest, for his soul's self-preservation, he can hardly view his sin as thoroughly as he should in the light of an outrage upon God. Forgiveness sets him at rest to find out what has been forgiven him. Therefore when he has gained that sense of access to Christ and acceptance with Him, of which I was speaking in the last chapter, it will be very salutary for him—perhaps after a month of thanksgiving, as Bishop Wilkinson advises in

his excellent little book called, "How to Begin a New Life"—perhaps almost at once—to prepare himself for as thorough a confession as lies in his power, thorough both in its grasp of details and also in the holy grief which the remembrance of his sins awakens.

It is, I believe, in many instances a matter of secondary importance whether such a confession be made by the penitent to Christ alone, or whether it be made also to the Church in the person of the minister of Christ. A truly contrite soul, which has found its way to the living Saviour, and felt the touch of His hand, in the sacred privacy of direct dealings with Him, and is walking in His ways within the unity of the Church, has a right to believe itself absolved and justified from past sin and set right with God forthwith. No one may trouble the peace of such a believer or break in upon it with demands of a more outward kind. It is not wholly unnecessary even now to protest against the intrusions of a wrong kind of sacerdotalism, such as would bar the free approach

of God's children to their Father, and would question the truth of their forgiveness if it be not dispensed by the hand of the accredited minister. With the utmost earnestness and jealousy we ought to maintain these rights and liberties of the Christian, which are at least as well worth dying for as any of the other rights and liberties which martyrdom has championed.

If souls can find the peace of God by themselves and for themselves, without any aid from the minister, and prove it by newness of life, all is well. We may rejoice with them and on their behalf. We could have done no more for them than they have been enabled by the Holy Spirit to do without us. The true priest has no greater joy than, like St. John the Baptist, to see the Bridegroom receive His bride, while the friend of the Bridegroom after the accomplishment of his preparatory duties stands unobserved. It is the very function of the priest to bring God and men together, not to interpose between them, or to keep them apart except through himself

as a medium of communication. If the latter were the right conception of priesthood, then Christ was no true priest; for His one aim in life and in death, and for ever, was and is to be but a Way to the Father, to bring us to God. If we are able so to direct men to God, we shall not much mind if they can do without consulting us further. Few kinds of letters can give the evangelist more satisfaction to receive than one like this: "I was much overwhelmed yesterday with the sense of sin, and was intending to come to you for help; but your address last night made it plain what I ought to do, and I did it; and I am thankful to say that I need not trouble you now."

But what I say is by no means the same thing as to say that no man ought to come and open his griefs to the minister, or that to open griefs to the minister is the less excellent thing, a course to be adopted only by those who cannot reach the higher. To say that the minister's absolution given after private confession is not always necessary, and that souls can enter into

a right peace without it, is by no means the same thing as to say that that absolution is useless, or even misleading, or blasphemous. It is quite possible for those who maintain strenuously the Christian's freedom of approach to God, and the absolution given by Christ direct, to maintain just as strenuously, when need requires, the "power and commandment" given by Him to His ministers, as the Prayer Book says, to declare and pronounce the absolution and remission of sins to the penitent.

This is a point on which there can be little doubt. On whatever doctrines the English Church may have thought good to leave matters open, her teaching about the authority of the ministry to absolve is as explicit and unmistakeable as that of any Church in Christendom. The only reason why the Book of Homilies denies to it the name of a sacrament is that Christ, who appointed it, appointed no fixed outward sign for it. Bishop Gheast, who had the main drawing up of the Articles on the Sacraments, using language which sounds—though

perhaps it only sounds—derogatory with reference to four of the so-called seven, says that they have no promise of God's "healthful grace"—that is, in technical language, the *gratia gratos faciens*—"as have Baptism, the Eucharist, and Penance."

Indeed there is little controversy here between the English and the Roman Churches. Roman theologians point out as anxiously as Anglicans that the priest absolves *ministerialiter*, and not as of his own right, and can only do it according to the laws of Christ, and to those who are rightly disposed. "The Church is not the mistress, but only the steward of the mysteries of God;" these are the words of the manual of theology most in favour at present with the Jesuits. "So far as [absolution] relates to the inward sphere, to the divine pardon, the pastor, as the commissioned messenger, watchman, and steward will not only, as every Christian man and woman may and should, point the burdened soul to the revealed secret of peace in the Word of God, but

will announce the certainty of pardon with just that authority which belongs to his divinely instituted office. He is the representative of the ministry founded by Christ Himself. And that fact, though it cannot make divine truth truer in itself, can, and should, and (in proportion to the man's spiritual correspondence to his office) will make it specially certain to the penitent, specially tangible to faith." These are the words of Bishop Moule. And for a very large number of persons it will be most profitable, and for many even a practical necessity, that they should be brought to confession before man as well as before God if their conversion is to be satisfactory and thorough.

I do not indeed think that it is generally a wise thing for the minister of conversion to speak much about confession (in that technical sense) in the course of a mission. It is rather the pastor's duty to speak of it in quieter times, among other doctrines and practices of the Gospel, so that when the time of a special effort comes, it may be

assumed that people understand about such things, and the missioner may need no more than to offer private help in general terms. An atmosphere of controversy is almost the least hopeful atmosphere in which to evangelise; and it is most difficult in present circumstances to speak directly in a mission about private confession without controversy being stirred. People are often hindered thereby from using the very help that they might otherwise have sought. I once ventured to remonstrate with an excellent missioner upon the way in which he was pressing confession, and pressing it almost in vain. In the next mission which he conducted, he determined not to mention the subject, and he told me that he had never heard so many confessions in a mission before.

I do not mean to say that it is always necessary to be so silent about the matter. If controversy *is* raised, without our doing, then it may be best to take occasion by it, and to go clearly and fully and sweetly into the question, and give a regular instruction upon it; but in

churches where confession is well known and much used, it is not necessary to do so; and in churches where it is unknown and there is a prejudice against it, it is probably unwise to do so at such a time. All that the missioner says and does should be of such a character as to establish confidence in him as a true man of God; and where that is established, the people will generally come to him if they want him, and he will be able to direct individual persons among those who come to him to use confession, if he sees them likely to be the better for it.

I am not now dealing with the systematic use of the confessional as a piece of the constant discipline of the inner life. It is well known that the Roman law of making at least a yearly confession to the priest, as an indispensable condition of remaining in communion with the Church, is a modern thing, for which there is no authority in Scripture, and of which there is no trace in antiquity. It dates no further back than the time of Innocent III., in the thirteenth century. Any attempt to impose it upon people in the

English Church, whether as a necessity to salvation, or as a necessity for living the higher life of grace, is, in my opinion, disloyal both to the express language of the Prayer Book, and also to its general spirit. We are in no way bound by decisions of the Councils of the Lateran or of Trent. However salutary for its own time we may consider the legislation of Innocent III. in this respect to have been, Englishmen of to-day are not Italians of seven centuries ago. But it is one thing to attempt to force confession upon all, and another to offer its benefits freely to all. Those who are fond of pointing out the lateness of the system of confession as an obligation, often forget that antiquity teems with references to it as a thing known, used, recommended, urged, where men were conscious of having sin upon their souls which made them either shrink from Communion or come to Communion unworthily.

The causes for which confession was urged by the Fathers were not indeed the same for which it was imposed by Innocent III. He imposed it

upon all alike, the regular and devout Christian, as well as the fallen one. The Fathers exacted it from those who had been guilty of open sin and had given scandal to the Church; and they urged it upon those who had been guilty of gross secret sin, and were therefore excommunicated by their own conscience. Doubtless in early days, as in our own, tender consciences were troubled and lost their peace through what would seem to others trifling compliances with evil, and could not rest without resorting to those who held the keys; but there was no general ordinance requiring all to make private confession whether they felt the need or not. On the contrary, as the Jesuit Hurter acknowledges, St. Chrysostom, for instance, who held most strongly the belief that unfaithful Christians should resort to the priesthood for confession and guidance, has more than one passage to this effect. "Wherefore again and again I exhort, I beseech and pray you, frequently to confess to God. I do not drag you forth to be a spectacle to your fellow-servants, nor would I compel you to declare your

sins to men. Open your conscience before God; show Him your wounds, and ask healing of Him. Show them to Him who does not upbraid, but cures; for even if you should hold your tongue, He knows it all." Such passages, as Hurter acknowledges, "cause grave difficulty" to those who are bound to uphold confession as an universal discipline.

There are real dangers connected with habitual and frequent confession against which it is necessary to guard carefully. I will enumerate some of them. There are characters which have a morbid turn to begin with, and are apt to become more morbid by frequent confession. Their attention is riveted to their own faults; and while the only way to overcome those faults would be to forget them and to fill the mind with other things, the constant watching against their evil habits tends to give the habits more fixity and greater power. And when such persons find the thing which they deplore becoming a larger and larger element in their moral consciousness—though perhaps much less

yielded to than they themselves suppose—they become depressed, and lose heart and hope, and sometimes very serious mischief is the result.

Persons of a different temperament may come to use the confessional in an outside kind of way, so that it acts as a substitute for spiritual approach to God. They think to settle up their soul's business from time to time with the confessor, and cheat themselves of all that is really humbling and elevating in repentance by this mechanical method. A youth who had been taught to use confession from early boyhood, but had clearly never been taught the true theory of it, said to me when he began to think for himself, "I cannot believe that it is right for me to *save up* my sins like that from one confession to another." Needless to say, I entirely agreed with him, and advised him that it was better to give up the practice than to continue it under such an idea.

To some, I fear, confession is scarcely more than an excitement, a sensation in which the pain is made the substratum of a pleasure.

Some persons come to depend too much upon their confessor's judgment, and lose something of their sense of personal responsibility. Occasionally this sensitiveness takes the form of being afraid to tell the full truth about some sin that they have to confess, to one whose good opinion they value, and then they make sacrilegious confessions, and get miserably wrong. Or they become scrupulous, always afraid that they did *not* tell the full truth and gave a false impression about themselves, and that therefore their absolution was not valid.

These are some of the forms of harm which spring out of the abuse of habitual confession, and others might easily be named. I mention these points to show that I do not advocate habitual confession in a blind and indiscriminate way. There are many persons whom it is necessary to warn off from confession —among them some who most crave for it. But the abuse of a thing is no argument against its use; and there are a great many people for whom confession, and regular and

habitual confession, is a wholesome and profitable thing.

Besides the great main reason for which confession is sought, namely, the clearing away of doubts about the Divine forgiveness, there are other reasons for which I believe it is legitimate to use it. For example, in many instances it deepens humility and increases contrition. Though it ought to be otherwise, souls cannot always realise very keenly the presence of God, nor feel as they would wish to feel the hatefulness of their sin in confessing it to Him alone; and the very fact that He already knows it before they confess it deprives the confession of something of its cutting pain. When they come to pour it out into the ear of a good man, who would not have known of it except for their free self-accusation, it helps them to discern something of what the sin must be in the sight of God. A good woman said to a priest one day that she had been urging her daughter to go to confession. "I said to her," she observed, "that she did not know what sin was until she

did so." If this implied that people thought more of the priest's judgment than of God's, it would be very bad; but that is not necessarily the case. St. Paul charges Timothy "before God and the elect angels," recognising that the witness of good created beings adds an element of solemnity even when the eye of the Creator is most truly acknowledged to be watching. Confession to the minister may legitimately be resorted to for the purpose of increasing a holy shame and sorrow.

From this, again, comes a further help. For one who is struggling with some special temptation, it is often a great advantage to feel that another person, besides the Divine Omniscience, is aware of what he is passing through, and the knowledge acts as both a restraint and an encouragement. It is far from being the highest motive for resisting sin, to think what some human fellow-servant would say and think; but the Bible often appeals to secondary motives, and they are sometimes the most effective, just because they are the most tangible, in the crisis

of a temptation. A great saint like Joseph can say at once, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" but it is not to be despised if, when God seems distant and abstract, a man is checked by saying to himself, "If I do it, I shall lose my situation," or "It will break my mother's heart," or "I shall have to confess it." Such arguments arrest the force of the onset, and make a hearing for the graver and holier considerations. The precautionary use of confession is of much value.

Then again, closely connected with this consideration, comes the help gained through the advice which an experienced and sympathetic Christian minister can give, and through his fervent prayers for those who have acquainted him with their peculiar difficulties. No one who believes in the promise given to united prayers can doubt that great benefit comes in this way to those who courageously open the needs of their souls to a faithful pastor.

And once more, there are many really good people who are much beset by some hateful

temptation, sometimes perhaps not wholly resisted, which makes them feel to be living an unreal life. Other people look up to them, and ask their opinion; and they seem to themselves to be like hypocrites, wearing an appearance of goodness, when those who admire them would be shocked if they knew what capabilities of evil were hidden beneath a specious appearance. To such persons, even if they do not seriously doubt their pardon and acceptance with God, it is a great relief and reassurance to know that, although it would probably be wrong and harmful to publish their sins to the world, yet there are those to whom, by their own voluntary self-disclosure, the worst is known, so far as it can be made known. Confession thus supplies a man with evidence for his own sincerity.

Several of these thoughts, though they are applicable to Christians who are questioning whether they shall use recurrent confession or not, apply also to the man who has recently been brought to himself and to God, and is thinking whether he had not better make a

clean breast before God's minister of that sinful past of which he is now ashamed. It is no sign of a weak faith that he should desire to do so. Often the very newness and strangeness of his experience, in the joy and peace of his changed life, makes a man wish for the judgment of another upon his state, lest he should be deceiving himself. It becomes a heavy burden to bear alone that mingled weight of happiness and grief. He feels that it would be a more complete and final rupture with the past, and a more solemn committal of himself to the new life, if he were to lay his iniquities open to the eyes of those who are henceforth to watch over him in God's name. And sometimes, without the least thought of doing anything meritorious, he feels as if it were but due, as a kind of reparation for past neglect and sins, that he should thus "give glory to God" by an acknowledgment to the authorities of the Church of what he had been beforetime.

It is a natural impulse, and Holy Scripture sets its seal upon it. Those who were baptized

by John in Jordan, confessed their sins—evidently for John at any rate to hear. Many who had been convicted of sin at Ephesus, "came, and confessed, and showed their deeds." To make such confession, with a view to absolution, is earnestly advised by St. James, at any rate in the case of sick men whose consciences accuse them of having committed sins; and obviously a thing which is good for the sick cannot be wrong for the whole. A wise guide to whom souls resort for guidance after their conversion will without much difficulty see in what cases it would be best to counsel a definite and solemn confession to the priest, and in what cases not. To advise one such solemn confession does not necessarily involve the doing of it again at stated intervals.

But whether the confession is to be made to the priest or not, it will probably be found useful in almost every case to counsel the making of a definite and solemn confession in some form or other. It may be right sometimes to cast souls back upon themselves, rather than to let them

open themselves out to a fellow-creature; but in such circumstances it would be well to get them to make their confession to our Lord with the same fulness and explicitness with which they would have made it to the priest. And it may be necessary to tell them how to set about it.

The first thing, then, is not to do it in haste, but to give plenty of time for a thorough survey and investigation of the past. Often a great deal of harm is done by hasty confessions, in which perhaps there is no intentional concealment, and the chief charges which conscience has to make are brought to light, but where, notwithstanding, the wounds of the soul are not thoroughly cleansed out; and the very relief which is gained through such a partial confession stands in the way of something better. If it is well to do the thing at all, it is well to do it completely, and really to get to the bottom of the sin which has been the soul's bane. For this, time and labour will be requisite.

In order that the self-examination may be

satisfactory, the penitent must call upon the Holy Ghost for aid. It is His work to quicken memory. Our Lord promises that the Comforter shall "bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." If He can bring one kind of things to remembrance, He can bring others; and He will, to deepen penitence, and to advance the cause of sanctification. There are some who are not afraid to pray that He would show them all their sins. This, it seems to me, is a dangerous and presumptuous request. The sins of which we have been guilty are so many that it would not be possible to recall them all in detail. Not a moment, perhaps, is altogether free from sin, and therefore it would require a second lifetime to enumerate all the sins of a lifetime. It is better to ask that those sins of which He would have us chiefly to repent may be brought home to our conscience. Of course none are to be willingly ignored. We must endeavour to make the search as exhaustive as we can, and to forestall as far as may be the judgment of the Great Day; but after all, our

self-knowledge will be imperfect, and we must be content to cast the imperfections of our confession, along with all other sins and shortcomings, upon Him who alone is the propitiation for them, lamenting that our penitence is so inadequate. Where the aid of the Holy Ghost is faithfully invoked, it is wonderful how things start up to mind which had been wholly forgotten, and smite shame and sorrow into the heart; and we ought, at each such sign of His working, to thank the Blessed Spirit who has heard our prayer.

As to the method of the self-examination, probably the worst that could be devised would be that which is very common, namely, to take the long list of questions in a book like the "Treasury of Devotion," or "Before the Throne," or "Break up your Fallow Ground"—excellent books in themselves—and to make the confession follow the list point by point. The use of such books is not, I think, to provide a form of confession ready made out, but to stimulate the conscience and the memory by suggesting directions in which to look within ourselves—

many of which would have escaped us without our being warned. They serve as miniature manuals of Christian ethics. But when the little manual has been well read, I should advise that it be put away, and that we should set to work more freely, after a method that may come more natural to ourselves, namely the historical method.

It is best, then, to divide the life up into its natural divisions, — early childhood, school life, college days,—or whatever may be the plainly marked portions of our career, and taking one portion at a time, or a part of one at a time, to proceed with the sad autobiography chapter by chapter. It is of high importance, I think, to exercise memory as fully as may be upon the earlier chapters. A man will generally find that the thing which has proved to be his predominant fault had its beginnings very far back, and that if he had but followed the teachings of his conscience as a child, he might have been spared endless distress, not to speak of matters

that are of deeper moment. In each chapter of the history I should advise searching methodically, under the headings of those three or four, six or seven, sins which appear to have been most characteristic, tracing carefully how pride and selfishness and deceitfulness, or whatever they may be, showed themselves and developed, first in one part of the time, and then in the next. All circumstances that make the sins worse should be carefully observed.

I should not recommend any one as a rule to write out in full all that comes to mind; to do so tends to make the confession at the end formal and lifeless. It is better to take a note-book and pencil; and after kneeling down and praying for the Holy Spirit's help, to make in the note-book just sufficient marks or signs by which to be able to recall, at the moment of confession, the things indicated. And the form into which the confession is thrown should be as simply narrative as possible. Instead of saying, "I told lies three times," it would be better to say what the three lies

were. The model for a confession is the confession, though so brief, of Achan in the book of Joshua. "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel; and thus and thus have I done; when I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and behold they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it." To confess like this, in honest detail, whether to God alone or to the priest also, as Achan did to Joshua—provided it be accompanied by that true contrition without which the most exact recital would be in vain—is to prepare the soul for fresh measures of peace and of cleansing. It is a sacrifice which God does not despise. Nothing is more useful to secure the permanence and solidity of a conversion.

It is not, of course, to be expected that all will be able to confess with the same clearness of detail. People differ very much in this respect. Sometimes very simple, uneducated folk will con-

fess with great insight and copiousness; others will scarcely have anything to say. I knew a farmer quite broken down by a sense of sin, and brought into great peace and joy, who honestly, I believe, tried to examine himself, but he could not call to mind any one sin he had ever committed. I have seldom seen a better conversion, but there was that one curious feature, that with an acute sense of sin in general he could not discern any detail or symptom. It shows that we cannot judge, and must beware of expecting uniformity of experience.

There is one particular thing with a view to which confession to man as well as to God is often almost a necessity. Of course the main object of all confession is prospective. It is not with a view to mere self-knowledge that we are exhorted to self-examination, but to self-knowledge with a further view to amendment, and not only to amendment, but, where occasion requires, to satisfaction or reparation. There are many sins for which nothing that can properly bear the name of satisfaction can be made;

but there are some for which it can; and there, no repentance is valid and no absolution, so far as we know, possible, unless there be at any rate the will to make satisfaction when the sin becomes known to the sinner. Such, of course, most obviously, are sins of dishonesty. And about these, hundreds and thousands of souls are in great perplexity. They know that they ought to give back what they have wrongly acquired, and they do not know how to do it. Perhaps the person injured is dead, or his address not known, or it is impossible to know how much is owing; the wrong cannot be confessed to him without implicating a third person; or it has been done to a whole company of persons, to whom acknowledgment cannot be made; or for many other reasons, the whole duty of reparation is beset with difficulties. A wise evangelist, I suppose, would always make a special point of inviting any who are entangled in such ways to come to him for private advice; and it is astonishing how frequently people are found to respond to the invitation, and what an immense

relief it is to them to have the way of restitution made plain. The only time I ever met Mr. Spurgeon in society, he went on for forty minutes telling instances of persons led to make restitution by what they had heard at his Tabernacle. It is a matter to which attention should be not unfrequently called, not only on the occasion of missions, but in ordinary parochial ministrations.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CONDITIONS OF EVANGELISTIC WORK IN THE CHURCH

I HAVE spoken of the nature and need of conversion, of the opportunities that offer themselves for endeavouring to convert men, of the order of thoughts which it is best to follow in order to bring men to conviction of sin and of their need of a Saviour, of the course which an awakened soul may be counselled to take in order to find true peace, and of the place of confession of sin in the process of conversion. I will only add to the general subject the remark that there is no reason in the nature of things why such a conversion as I have spoken of should not be repeated, if by sad mishap a second or a third, or a thirtieth, conversion should be required. It is, however, usual, and perhaps convenient, to apply the word only to the first real turning of the soul to God,

and to employ some other term for the return of those who are often called backsliders—that is, persons who have known what it is to live in the peace of forgiveness and the fellowship of Christ, and have, for one reason or another, lost what they had gained, and relapsed into indifference, and unbelief, and despair, and perhaps into what the Article so graphically describes as "wretchlessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation."

The repentance and return of the backslider is happily a possible thing, and much more than a possible thing; but it differs from what is commonly called conversion in more than one way. In the first place, the penitent has the advantage of already knowing by experience the way to proceed; his own past history serves him as a guide. But on the other hand, the work of return is not so easy for him. He is more paralysed by the sense of sin than one who has never known the blessing of freedom from it. With every relapse into a state of uncontested sin, the soul loses something of its

elasticity, its power of rebound. It can be forgiven, and renewed, and sanctified; and the joy over it in heaven may perhaps be greater even than the joy over the first conversion of a sinner, in proportion as the chances of its return seemed fewer; but probably in most cases there is less of joy in the heart of the returning backslider himself. He has lost confidence in his own stability of purpose, and cannot count with the same buoyancy of feeling upon retaining his regained position. The priest who is to help him will need much faith and hope, in order to kindle faith and hope in the penitent; and the struggle will probably be a long and weary one. But the method of helping men in such a condition does not greatly differ from that of helping men in the crisis of a first conversion.

I would now pass on to say something about the conditions under which evangelistic work can be most hopefully done, with an eye to the interests of the Church at large.

I have already said that I do not consider the functions of the evangelist and of the

pastor to be wholly different from each other, and mutually exclusive. Every pastor ought to endeavour to have at least the heart and spirit of an evangelist, even if he has not an evangelist's utterance. Supposing that he lacks the natural gift of eloquence for public addresses —though it is the greatest mistake to think that eloquence is the chief necessity for a missioner—yet the pastor should cultivate that sympathy with his flock, and that knowledge of their state, which may make him able to use the private opportunities of preaching the Gospel, to which I called attention in a former chapter. Even when he feels that for some reason or another he is not the man to speak to this one or that one in his parish, and that he would only do more harm than good at any given moment by attempting it, yet he can keep on praying for the man's conversion, so that when some one else takes his place, or the circumstances change, the way may have been prepared by grace. And when occasion serves, he must endeavour to make his

public discourses as well calculated to effect the conversion of sinners as God may enable him to do. The parish priest is, of course, the person responsible for bringing the Gospel home to all his parishioners.

But there is great need of supplementing the parochial cure of souls by something from outside. The best of parish priests are generally the first to recognise the fact. They see that they cannot do everything for their people that needs to be done. There are aspects of truth which do not habitually present themselves to one man, while they do so to another; and it is a gain to all parties to have those differing *nuances* brought forward, if it be done discreetly, and not so as to suggest contrasts and oppositions. It is a great thing also to get a man to say over again to your people what you yourself have said, that, as holy George Herbert says, "out of the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." As there are many things which a parish priest cannot well say to his people, but which a

stranger can say without difficulty, so on the other hand there are confessions which the lay people can make to a stranger, and difficulties about which they can ask him, which could not well be brought to the parish priest,—not even where the parish priest is a holy and wise man, and where the people love and revere him.

Parish priests ought to lay themselves out to get other clergymen pretty frequently to come and preach, and to visit also in some instances, in their parishes. "I know," said John Wesley, "were I to preach one whole year in one place, I should preach both myself and my congregation asleep. Nor can I believe it was ever the will of the Lord that any congregation should have one teacher only. . . . No one whom I ever yet knew has all the talents which are needful for beginning, continuing, and perfecting the work of grace in a whole congregation." The man who wrote these sensible words went to work in an impatient and disloyal way to supply what he felt was needed. He had no reverence for the Divine authority by which

the persons found within a given area are solemnly committed to the charge of a particular minister. He used, indeed, to ask the parson's leave to preach; but if the leave was refused, he took it all the same. This defiant breaking of all ecclesiastical rules made many enemies to him and to his doctrine, and was one of the main causes why the Methodist Society became a schism. It did not really procure access for Wesley and his followers to places where they would not otherwise have been able to get in; for if it had been known to be his rule never to go to a parish where he was not welcomed by the authorities of the Church, he would soon have found nineteen parishes out of twenty ready and even eager to welcome him. Nothing is gained by violating the sacred order of the Church, and intruding into places where you have no commission to act.

But, on the other hand, it is certain that in no other Church have the presbyters had the power that English presbyters possess, to shut up

their parishes against the ministrations of men from outside, and neither to give the parishioners what they need themselves, and to hinder others from doing so. It is good to respect ecclesiastical jurisdictions; but ecclesiastical jurisdiction was never intended to become an iron tyranny without redress, as it too often is in England. St. Peter might have been writing with a direct prevision of our English parochial system when he warned the elders *μὴ κατακυριεύειν τῶν κλήρων*, not to lord it over the lots; that is, over the allotted spheres of government.

The fact is that we have lost sight of the primitive and true idea that the bishop is the real pastor of all the souls in his diocese, and that the presbyter in each parish is responsible to him, and not to Christ alone. It ought to be competent for the bishop, at any rate with the advice and concurrence of his council the chapter, or of the clergy of the rural deanery, not indeed to dismiss the authorised curate, but to send any

one into any parish to supplement the ministrations of the curate, whether the curate wishes it or not. Although it would be intolerable for an unauthorised presbyter to thrust himself, as Wesley did, into the jurisdiction of another duly appointed, there is no breach of order in the bishop's sending an occasional visitant, alongside of the man who has the habitual mission and jurisdiction over the place.

It would indeed be invidious and work harm if the bishop were only to send his non-parochial agents into parishes that were neglected and ill-taught; but in all probability the method pursued would be quite the reverse. When a particular district of South Wales was selected to be the scene of an itinerant mission some years ago, a few of the clergy were disposed to ask why they and their parishes were considered to need evangelising more than others, and the bishop explained truthfully that he had selected the district as one that was specially hopeful and promising to begin upon. If that were at all

frequently the method, there would soon be no great difficulty in sending an evangelistic agency into parishes of the less promising and less well-worked kind also.

The persons sent to strengthen the cause of God in a place by a mission more or less prolonged may of course themselves be parochial clergymen holding cure of souls elsewhere. It does not need to be said that many of our best missioners have been and are incumbents of parishes.

Many advantages arise from their being so. They come with a peculiar sympathy for the priests of the parish which they are to help, and this is a very necessary thing in order that all may work harmoniously. Knowing what they would feel about a stranger's ministration in their own parishes, they know how to avoid arousing susceptibilities and causing jealousies. And besides this, a man who is himself a parish priest is prepared for the work of a missioner by all the tender and softening experience which he gains daily as he goes in and out among

his people. Theories which have a tendency to become hard are mellowed by seeing their practical effect in life. The missioner whose whole time is given up to mission work is apt to become professional over it, and there are few things more odious than professionalism in any department of the ministry, and perhaps the worst is professionalism in this department. A good Christian-hearted cadet at one of our great military colleges was asked one day what sort of man they had for a chaplain; and he answered, "Oh, he's just what you call a clergyman." Blameless compliance with a professional etiquette, and even scientific adeptness in a professional line of study, is not the thing which wins souls, especially the souls of the young; and I do not doubt that a man who comes warm from the contact of spirits which he is training steadily for eternity, comes to his mission with a reality and warmth which might often be lacking to men who start from a non-parochial centre,—a hermit's cell, or a college in the university, or a cloister. And

such men carry back also to their own parishes a glow and fervour from the mission in which they have taken part, which is most beneficial to their own parishioners.

Nevertheless, it becomes increasingly clear that every diocese needs a body of priests within it who are free from parochial ties, and able to go wherever they may be needed, and for as long as they may be needed. It is generally impossible to say beforehand how long a mission is to last. The missioner ought not to be tied for time, but free to go on for a month if needed; and this would usually be out of the question for a parish priest. The parishes of well-known missioners often suffer to some extent by the absence of the incumbent. Some of the parishioners who most need him are sure to fall sick or have some misfortune just when he is away; and even if he does not really go away very frequently, the people get into a way of thinking and speaking of him as if they never felt sure of him, whether he would be at home or not. This is a pity. It is evident that a man with peculiar gifts for

evangelistic work can do his duty much more freely if, like Mr. Aitken and Dr. Body, he can be independent of parochial ties. Still more is it the case, if the conception of the duty of missioners is extended to the taking charge of parishes during a time of vacancy, or in special circumstances. Often when a good clergyman dies or is removed, his work goes to pieces before the next incumbent comes; or the death or removal of a bad clergyman gives the bishop an opportunity of showing that he really cares for the poor parish; and it is of lasting benefit to a whole neighbourhood if he can send a useful man to step in immediately to take temporary charge. It is no wonder that the bishops are beginning to get together groups of such men, ready to be always at the bishop's disposal. Among the Roman Catholics, the Oblate Fathers founded by St. Charles Borromeo have this for their special function and purpose. And among ourselves, several dioceses in varying forms have such organisations of men, free to do any work that may be assigned to them.

It seems likely that more and more of the work of the Church in England will have to be done by such bodies of men. If the disendowment of the Church were brought about, it would leave the Church in outlying and poor places, for a long time at any rate, in a state of piteous distress. And apart from disestablishment, even now, with the steady fall in clerical incomes and one thing and another, the problem is becoming exceedingly difficult, to know how the country districts are to be supplied with pastors. In some of the more scattered and isolated dioceses, the clergy positively will not stay. Some of them cannot bear the poverty to which they and their families are subject. Others feel that they want more consecutive and intense work than they find among the lanes and moors; and with a curious mixture, very often, of noble eagerness for strenuous action and of selfish craving for a less monotonous existence, they fly off to the big towns, throwing up curacies and little livings, and thinking, apparently, that it does not matter what becomes of a few sheep

in the wilderness, so long as they can go up and see the battle.

There is more than one good large district at the present moment where it seems as if, because of the loneliness and the poverty, the work of the Church cannot be carried on any longer upon a strictly parochial system, and where the only possibility is to form men into bands, residing either permanently or for fixed periods at some common centre, and working a group of parishes together in common. It was the way in which many of those districts were managed in mediæval times, when the whole country was dotted, not only with monasteries, but with collegiate churches, to which were attached a dean or archpriest, and four or five, or more, prebendaries, doing their best for a stretch of country round them. We shall probably come back to that method in some places before long.

The truth is, that we have allowed ourselves in England to sink too much into an uniformity of ideal with regard to the ministry of God's Word and Sacraments. We seem to have been

able to imagine nothing but a parochial clergy, and even these too much of one type. "Isaac's pure blessings, and a verdant home"—the words are in the "Lyra Apostolica"—they seem to sum up the ambition of the English clergy—of those at least who could not aspire to more of a career, to canonries and deaneries and palaces. I should not wish to say a word in disparagement of such an ideal. It has produced in times past, and may still continue to produce, a race of men of most useful and wholesome influence in the country. There is nothing better on earth since the gates of Eden were shut than the households of the English country clergy in general—holy, cultivated, often learned, diligent in their duties, kind to every one, all the truer patterns and examples to their flocks because they share so much of the social life of their neighbours, with sons and daughters growing up round them, and not austerely refusing what they have learned purely to enjoy. It is not possible to value too highly the life of the typical English parsonage, or its result upon the nation at large.

But it is not the only life possible for the minister of Christ in modern England. Our times demand also ministers of a different type, and especially in connection with the ministry of conversion; and those clergymen or candidates for orders who are still young, and unmarried, and not engaged to be married, may well be urged to pause and think, and examine prayerfully whether another type of ministry may not be the one for which they have a vocation from God.

Though the cry is not quite so loud at the present moment as it was a few years ago, the cry has on every side been raised, even in the most unexpected quarters, that what the Church most wants is the revival of communities of devoted men to rival the great communities of devoted women which form one of the most remarkable features of modern life, and which have so amply justified their existence, both by the holy lives that have been trained in them, and by the magnificent practical work that they are doing. Much of the language that was used about

brotherhoods, both in conferences and in the press, was extremely foolish, especially when men framed rules for non-existing communities, and spoke as if such things could be created by advertisement, and not by the voice of the Lord of souls alone. It is a good thing that there is less talk about the matter than there was; but it was a good thing also that the subject should be raised, in order that young men might have the opportunity of asking themselves whether God were calling them to such a life.

Even apart from the joining of a brotherhood, it is exceedingly important for a clergyman, or one who hopes to be a clergyman, not to commit himself, without great circumspection, to enter the married state. Great as are the consequences of that step to a layman, they are still greater to a clergyman. It is deeply to be regretted when a young man still at college, or in the very outset of his ministry, before he has had time to look about him and to choose from a sufficiently wide acquaintance, with no reasonable prospect of a speedy marriage, in a moment of weakness

betrays his heart, and fixes his destiny—probably inflicting the hardships and strain of a long engagement upon another besides himself, which he has no right to do. It is deeply to be regretted when a clergyman or candidate for Holy Orders has not self-control enough to conceal what he feels, until he is in a position to warrant an offer of marriage, even when the marriage in itself is likely to prove a good and suitable one; but it is still more deeply to be regretted when, as is often the case, both the husband and the wife would have *done* better and *been* better apart, and when nothing has been gained by the marriage to compensate for the loss of that freedom of which St. Paul speaks, in which the unmarried "waits upon the Lord without distraction." The virgin life is, as St. Paul says, and as our Lord says, a "gift" from God. It is not, perhaps, a very common gift. "All men cannot receive this saying," says our Lord, "but they to whom it is given; but whoso will receive it, let him receive it." If any has received such a gift, it would be a serious loss if through

negligence, self-indulgence, a moment of passion or of craving for human sympathies, he should squander what never can be recovered, except, perhaps, through the sufferings of widowhood.

It is difficult to suppose that He who, when He was upon earth, went about calling upon men to sell all that they had and give to the poor, and to take up the Cross and follow Him,—who used such language about loving family ties more than Himself, and made such glowing promises to those who for His sake and the Gospel's should leave father and mother, wife and children, houses and lands,—it is difficult, I say, to suppose that He has so changed His methods that there are few or none whom He calls now to such a life of self-devotion. Throughout the course of the Christian centuries He has used and greatly blessed the services of hermits and monks and friars and religious congregations, as well as those of married men. I do not forget, and have no desire to minimise, the mischief done by men belonging to such orders, and the degradation

to which they have sometimes fallen; but the degradation is not a necessary part of their existence. We cannot read pages like those of Dr. Westcott's little volume called "Disciplined Life" without feeling that an earnest Christian must needs sympathise deeply with the movements of which St. Anthony and St. Benedict and St. Francis and St. Ignatius are representatives; and that whatever may be the form of Disciplined Life suited to the conditions of modern society, there must be some form—perhaps many—which it may hopefully take.

It is indeed somewhat disheartening to see how little progress has been made as yet in the formation of religious houses of men in the England of to-day. But after all, the thing has only been going on for a short time. It is to be expected that numbers of experiments will fail before the right thing appears. *Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona multi.* No doubt many had retired into the wilderness before Pachomius; and other groups of men had

gathered around religious leaders for discipline before the legislation of Monte Cassino gave them stability. So it may be now. The difficulties are very great—far greater with our sex than with the other. Men are not so amenable to discipline as women. Too often those who have believed themselves to have felt the call of God to a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience, have mixed up with it some special fancies of their own, so that instead of combining together to form strong centres, they have started independently, hoping to attract disciples to themselves. But still there is at least one religious community of men in England which has stood the test of time and change and mistakes and desertions, and is stronger than ever. I mean the Society of St. John the Evangelist at Cowley, which deserves the admiration and gratitude of all who care for the work of the conversion of sinners. God add to its numbers, and prosper their life and their labours.

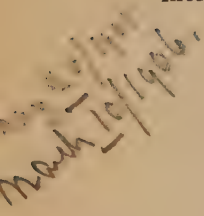
"For My sake and the Gospel's"—that is the word of our Lord, the cause for which He challenges men to leave all desires for a comfortable settlement in this world. It is certainly one of the most convincing proofs of devotion to Him, and one of the most cogent arguments in winning the world, when men voluntarily, and without ostentation, set themselves to a lifelong task of this kind—not because they like it, nor because it fits in with their peculiar ambitions and dreams, but because they solemnly believe that our Lord is calling them to it. No great outburst of enthusiasm for the spread of the kingdom of God—however anti-sacerdotal in its character—has been without something of the kind. Wycliffe, the great foe of the corrupted orders of friars, founded his own order of "poor priests," to go about preaching on greens and in market-places and engaging individuals in conversation, much like the friars whom they opposed. It was the same with the Methodist movement at the beginning; it has been the same with the Salvation Army. It does not

seem possible spiritually to reach some portions of the people, either in town or country, through stationary agencies only, or without the labour of men and women who are seen to have given up everything for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, and whose very countenances testify that they have proved the truth of those first three Beatitudes—the Beatitudes which correspond to their three counsels of perfection—"Blessed are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek."

It will, no doubt, be only a small proportion of the clergy who will feel any vocation from God to the life of poverty, chastity, and obedience, in the technical sense in which those words have come to be used. The rest have perhaps a harder task before them, and one at least as honourable, if it be duly accomplished—namely, to use this world, as St. Paul says, without abusing it; that is, without using it to the utmost. It is perhaps easier to embrace a voluntary poverty by an outward relinquishment of riches than to be "poor in spirit" while remaining rich in fact; and so with other counsels.

But of course we cannot hope to do much in the cause of God, whether as men who make a speciality of evangelistic work or in the more usual and general work of the ministry, unless we are endeavouring to live in the safe shadow of the Cross, denying all worldly lusts and cravings. Earth holds no unhappier man than the man who preaches because he is bound to preach, while his conscience tells him that he is untrue to what he preaches; who has recourse to rhetorical tricks and artifices to supply what he no longer dares to claim from the Spirit of God whom his life is outraging. It is true that God often blesses the words that are spoken by men under condemnation and under *self*-condemnation, using sometimes the gratitude of those whom they have helped to bring them round to repentance again. But the one hope of good success in all preaching of the Gospel—such success as is prayed for in the Ordinal—is to keep near to God, to maintain a clean conscience, to look constantly to Christ as an ever-present Master and Guide, and to give the heart

up to the Holy Spirit that He may not only dwell in it, but may fill it, and enlarge it, and fill it more and more. Such an one is always ready; and *si Dominus magnus uoluerit*, "When the great Lord will, He will fill him with the Spirit of understanding, and he will pour forth the eloquence of his wisdom like showers"—the showers that make withered souls to spring up into newness of life.



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